

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## The Burford Masons and the changing world of building practice in England, 1630-1730

### Thesis

#### How to cite:

Mobus, Melody Ann Clara (2012). The Burford Masons and the changing world of building practice in England, 1630-1730. PhD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2011 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:  
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000d4ed>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)



**THE BURFORD MASONS AND THE CHANGING WORLD  
OF BUILDING PRACTICE IN ENGLAND  
1630-1730**

Melody Ann Clara Mobus, BA, FRICS

Thesis submitted to the Department of Art History, The Open University,  
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2011

Volume 1 of 2

Date of Submission: 30 September 2011

Date of Award: 3 May 2012

# Volume 2 restricted access

## **ABSTRACT**

Architectural history has traditionally focused on the named architect and the completed building. Investigation of the master craftsmen who realised the emerging architect's ideas while continuing to build to their own design has only recently been embarked upon. This thesis sets out to address this imbalance by scrutinising a group of master masons closely connected with Wren for over five decades.

This thesis, for the first time, explores the Burford Masons, three dynasties comprising the Strongs, the Kempsters, and Ephraim Beauchamp, who rose to join the elite of mason-contractors in the rebuilding of London. Examining their experience over the period 1630-1730, it aims to shed light on building practices undergoing transition to modern methods. The research is largely based on primary sources, some hitherto untapped, which has produced a wealth of new evidence.

The Burford Masons' careers are set out in Chapter Two, a Catalogue Raisonné giving the first comprehensive account of their works. The remaining chapters are thematic, Chapter Three investigating their experience after the Great Fire, a catalyst for changing building practices and their careers. Chapters Four and Five study the Burford Masons' evolving contractual arrangements, and their strategies to withstand the endemic problem of dilatory payments. Chapter Six scrutinises changes in London Masons' Company and the Burford Masons' involvement with it. Chapter Seven explores their role in design, both in conjunction with the architect and as mason-architects in their own right. It identifies them as a school of masons emerging from quarries.

The research deepens knowledge of the evolution of the contracting system in both London and the provinces. It shows the Burford Masons also in the process of change, becoming interdisciplinary master-builders, entrepreneurs, and financiers.



## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

This thesis consists of two volumes.

### **Volume 1**

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Abbreviations and Notes on the Text

**Chapter One: Introduction** pp. 1-27

**Chapter Two: The Burford Masons and their Careers** pp. 28-58

- generations of Burford Masons
- geographical mobility
- wealth accumulation
- social mobility

**Chapter Three: The Burford Masons after the Great Fire of London, 1666-1681** pp. 59-98

- Section One: Circumstances after the Great Fire
- the Fire and its impact
  - legislation to facilitate rebuilding
  - the Strong and Kempster stone operations
  - differential rates of pay

Section Two: The Wren Connection

- Section Three: Response of Strong and Kempster to the post-Fire situation
- response as purveyors of stone
  - response as masons
  - assessment of Strong's and Kempster's success in London

**Chapter Four: Business Organisation: Employment** pp. 99-153

- the Burford Masons' employment in the light of Wren's '3 ways of working'
- examination of the Burford Masons' surviving contracts
- basis upon which Burford Masons won their contracts

**Chapter Five: Business Organisation: Finance** pp. 154-206

- general financial and operational background
- the Burford Masons' experience with dilatory payments
- the Burford Masons as contractors: profit
- the Burford Masons' use of capital
- strategies used by the Burford Masons to counter the effects of dilatory payments

<b>Chapter Six: The Burford Masons' Involvement with the London Masons' Company</b>	pp. 207-235
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the London Masons' Company in transition</li> <li>- reasons for the Burford Masons' involvement with the Company</li> <li>- the Burford Masons' commitment to the Company</li> </ul>	
<b>Chapter Seven: The Burford Masons as Translators of Design</b>	pp. 236-300
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- continuity and change in masons' skill base</li> <li>- design skills: the architect and the mason</li> <li>- the Burford Masons as mason-architects</li> <li>- stylistic influences on the provinces</li> </ul>	
<b>Chapter Eight: Conclusion</b>	pp. 301-306

## Volume 2

<b>Appendix One: Sources and Careers of the Burford Masons</b>	pp. 307-349
<b>Appendix Two: Catalogue Raisonné</b>	pp. 350-365
Manuscript Sources and Bibliography	pp. 366-376
List of Illustrations	pp. 377-381
Illustrations	

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This thesis would probably not have been undertaken without the early encouragement of Malcolm Airs for my research of Christopher Kempster. Over the course of this PhD I have been most appreciative of the support and guidance which my supervisors Elizabeth McKellar and Susie West have patiently given me. Also remembered, with gratitude, are Martin Vessey and John Ashdown, who believed in me in supporting my application for research.

I have thanks to many Burford people, in particular, Christopher Walker of the Tolsey Museum, who made available Kempster's Daybook and responded to my countless, probably tedious, queries; also David Cohen, who as mayor generously gave me unlimited access to recently-found documents, Abbot Stuart then of the Priory, Julia Melvin, the late Roger Warner, and Lord of the Manor Nicholas Mills.

Many of the secondary sources were found in London Libraries, and my gratitude lies especially with the ever-helpful staff of the Guildhall Library. I extend my thanks to Jo Wisdom at St Paul's Cathedral Library, and to Geoffrey Fisher, then at the Conway Library of the Courtauld Institute. I should like to acknowledge the help of many archivists, particularly those at Oxford colleges, the College of Arms, St Bartholomew's Hospital, and Westminster Abbey.

My thanks also to the experts who shared their wisdom on particular issues, Geoffrey Beard, James W.P. Campbell, Anthony Geraghty, and the late Howard Colvin and Andor Gomme. To Siegfried Helm, for his editorial skills, support, and sense of perspective, I am most indebted.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTES ON THE TEXT

ABC	Abingdon Borough Council, Oxfordshire
AQC	<i>Ars Quatuor Coronatorum</i>
BEA	Bank of England archives, London
BL	British Library, London
Bodl.	Bodleian Library, Oxford
BOE	<i>The Buildings of England</i>
BT	Burford Tolsey Museum, Oxfordshire
CAA	College of Arms Archives, London
Campbell 'Finances'	James W.P. Campbell, 'The Finances of the Carpenter in England 1660-1710: A Case Study on the Implications of the Change from Craft to Designer-based Construction', in <i>L'Edilizia Prima della Rivoluzione Industriale. Secc.XIII-XVIII</i> , ed. by Simonetta Cavaciocchi (Prato: Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini" 2005), pp. 313-346
Campbell 'Fortune'	James W.P. Campbell, 'Building a Fortune: The Finances of the Stonemasons Working on the Rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral 1675-1720', <i>Proceedings of the Third International Congress on Construction History</i> (2000), 297-304 [viewed online 2009 at: <a href="http://www.bma.arch.unige.it/PDF/CONSTRUCTION_HISTORY_2009/VOL1/CAMPBELL-James_VW_Paper_layouted.pdf">www.bma.arch.unige.it/PDF/CONSTRUCTION_HISTORY_2009/VOL1/CAMPBELL-James_VW_Paper_layouted.pdf</a> ]
Carøe	W. Douglas Carøe, <i>'Tom Tower', Christ Church, Oxford: Some Letters of Sir Christopher Wren to John Fell, Bishop of Oxford, hitherto unpublished, annotated by W. Douglas Carøe</i> (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923)
CCM	Muniments of Christ Church, Oxford
Colvin, 'Townesends'	Howard Colvin, 'The Townesends of Oxford: A Firm of Georgian Master-Masons and its Accounts', <i>Georgian Group Journal</i> , 10 (2000), 43-60
Dictionary	Howard Colvin, <i>Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840</i> , 4th edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008)
GA	Gloucestershire Archives, Gloucester
GL	Guildhall Library, London
HKW	H.M. Colvin, ed., <i>The History of the King's Works</i> , 6 vols (London: HMSO, 1963-82), v (1976)
HRO	Hertfordshire Record Office, Hertford
KJ	Douglas Knoop and G.P. Jones
KvW	TNA, PRO C 106/145, Master Richards' Exhibits, Kempster v. Wrigglesworth
Letter-book	Letter Book of Edward Strong Junior, 1730-1740
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives, London

<i>London Mason</i>	Douglas Knoop and G.P. Jones, <i>The London Mason in the Seventeenth Century</i> (Manchester: Manchester University Press and the Quatuor Coronati Lodge, 1935)
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library, London
NCA	New College Archives, Oxford
ORO	Oxfordshire Record Office, Oxford
<i>Parentalia</i>	Christopher Wren, <i>Parentalia: or Memoirs of the Family of the Wrens; viz. Of Mathew Bishop of Ely, Christopher Dean of Windsor, etc but chiefly of Sir Christopher Wren, Late Surveyor-General of the Royal Building, President of the Royal Society, etc etc</i> , ed. by Stephen Wren (London: Osborn and Dodsley, 1750)
Plot	Robert Plot, <i>The Natural History of Oxford-shire: Being an Essay toward the Natural History of England</i> , 2nd edn (London: Lichfield, 1705; reprint Chicheley: Minet, 1972)
PRO	Public Record Office
RCHM	Royal Commission on Historic Manuscripts
RCHME	Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects, London
RS	The Royal Society
SBHA	St Bartholomew's Hospital Archives and Museum, London
SJCA	St John's College, Oxford, archives
SM	Sir John Soane's Museum, London
TCA	Archive of Trinity College, Oxford
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
VCH	<i>The Victoria County History of England</i>
WRO	Worcestershire Record Office, Worcester
WS	<i>The Wren Society</i> , ed. by A.T. Bolton and H.D. Hendry, 20 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924-43)

All dates and spelling are modernised, unless within quotation marks.

References to counties are according to their pre-1974 boundaries

Monetary conversions to modern values are by means of The National Archives National Currency Converter.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION

#### WHY RESEARCH THE BURFORD MASONS?

Architectural history has traditionally concerned itself with the style of buildings and the architects who designed them, only recently turning to consider the contribution of craftsmen. My thesis sets out to carry this line of investigation further, exploring the changing world of building practice in England in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries through the experience of a specific group of masons. It aims to redress this imbalance in research by looking at the role of three dynasties of masons active during this period of accelerating change from medieval to modern practices in the building industry. It may be viewed as a contribution to increasing endeavours to investigate architectural history from below.<sup>1</sup>

It was Howard Colvin, in the Introduction to his *Dictionary*, who observed that 'the history of British architecture is bound up with its own practice'.<sup>2</sup> He recognised that the study of architects and craftsmen 'would scarcely be intelligible' without

---

<sup>1</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, *History in Practice* 2nd edn (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), p. 14; see also Peter Guillery, *Built from Below: British Architecture and the Vernacular* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 21.

insight into building practices, a principle he followed in other studies.<sup>3</sup> This line of enquiry into aspects of the construction process has since gained momentum, as is shown by the establishment in 1983 of the Construction History Society with its associated journal. A current proponent in this field is James W.P. Campbell, with his studies on seventeenth-century carpenters, bricklayers, and the role of masons at St Paul's Cathedral.<sup>4</sup>

Colvin's observations are particularly relevant to the research period of this thesis, a time when the emerging architect was beginning to undermine the traditional design role of the master craftsman while still relying on the craftsman's expertise to bring his ideas to fruition. In examining building practices, this thesis explores the interrelationship between the architect and the masons under investigation with the aim of identifying the masons' various roles, some new, in creating the many significant buildings they were involved with. In looking at the part masons played in the design process, this study challenges the earlier connoisseurial approach to architectural history which assumed the emerging architect to have taken an all-embracing role. This is the first study to investigate in depth the financial contribution these masons made to major building projects, and to place this within the context of their wider business operation.

---

<sup>3</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends'; *HKW*.

<sup>4</sup> James W.P. Campbell, 'Fortune' and 'Finances'; 'The Carpentry Trade in Seventeenth-Century England', *Georgian Group Journal*, 12 (2002), 215-237; 'Seventeenth-Century Bricklayers' Contracts: Wren and the City Churches', *Construction History Society Newsletter*, 64 (2002), 7-12; *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007).

The research period of 1630 to 1730 witnessed substantial changes in architectural style, encompassing the Gothic surviving from medieval times, the permeation of the newly-arrived classical style from courtly and aristocratic circles into more general acceptance, and the brief flowering of the Baroque. It was in this period that the architect emerged, stimulating a significant shift in roles in the building process. The hundred years under consideration cover the known activity of the three chosen masons' dynasties, which coincided with the great social and political upheavals of the Civil War and the Protectorate, and the ensuing relative stability of the Restoration. The Great Fire of London generated urgent demand for unprecedented large-scale rebuilding in the City. The Restoration and the Great Fire instigated a building boom of unparalleled opportunities for those in the building trades, which was to last, with fluctuations, until the end of the period under scrutiny.

This period of change inevitably presented challenges to the contemporary mason. How his traditional role underwent adjustments with the arrival of the architect, how he adapted to new employment practices, learnt to craft new styles and techniques, and how he adjusted to the credit-based economy were all issues he had to resolve. If not all contemporary masons were affected by these changes, they were central to the group chosen for scrutiny who experienced them particularly at the cutting edge of rebuilding the City of London.

The masons whose experience will be examined are the Strongs, the Kempsters and the Beauchamps, three dynasties who are here called the 'Burford Masons' in view



of their area of origin in Oxfordshire. They are examined as a unique group in this thesis because of their close interrelationship, striking similarities in career, and their emergence as stonemasons from ownership of quarries. All three dynasties originated from within a mile of each other, members of all the dynasties went up to London to participate in the rebuilding as soon as they could, formed working partnerships with each other, and intermarried. Examination of one dynasty informs about the others, providing a broad, yet related research base for analysis and interpretation.

Their careers justify investigation on several grounds. Firstly, their activity over the entire hundred years' research period provides fertile ground for studying changes in building practice. Secondly, their area of operation encompassed both the City of London and the provinces stretching to fourteen counties, permitting insight into very different working environments. A further reason is their contribution to creating some of the most important buildings of their time, including St Paul's Cathedral, City churches, Winchester Palace, Greenwich Hospital, and Blenheim Palace, the latter two having won international recognition as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The breadth of their client base, including the gentry, aristocracy, Commissioners for rebuilding, and even the Crown, each making their own demands, presents another justification for their study. The Burford Masons' experience of working extensively with Sir Christopher Wren, the leading architect of the time with whom they collaborated for much of their careers, and their close involvement with other major architects such as Nicholas Hawksmoor, Sir John

Vanbrugh, and Thomas Archer provides the fifth reason for their scrutiny, permitting close examination of the working relationship between the newly-emerging persona of the architect and the mason with his traditional skills.

The sixth reason is the discovery of fresh documentary material, in particular, the recent re-appearance of Christopher Kempster's Daybook, now held in the Burford Tolsey Museum, which prompted this research.<sup>5</sup> Since then, other documents relating to the Kempster family have been discovered.<sup>6</sup> These newly-available sources, together with those which were already in the public domain but had remained largely untapped, like William Kempster's six daybooks and diverse papers relating to the Kempsters, held in The National Archives, should serve to shed new light on the Burford Masons' careers.<sup>7</sup>

## **ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION: AN HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Secondary literature which is particularly pertinent to issues investigated in the individual chapters of this thesis is discussed in detail in the Introduction to the relevant chapters. The literature reviewed at this juncture is intended to place the research within the discipline of architectural history, particularly the more specialised field of construction history.

---

<sup>5</sup> BT, Daybook.

<sup>6</sup> BT, D660-670.

<sup>7</sup> KvW.

The connoisseurial approach to architectural history, prioritising style, architect, and issues like attribution and influence, has concerned itself little with the process of construction and the role of the craftsmen involved. The question of style is not central to this thesis, as the Burford Masons generally built to the design of others. The historiography considered here shows a growing awareness of the role of the craftsman, particularly the mason, focusing on construction history. The close co-operation of the Burford Masons with Wren over some fifty years makes the publication of the Wren Society volumes (1924-43) a vital starting point in reviewing the literature.

Following the bicentenary anniversary of Wren's death in 1923, the Wren Society produced twenty volumes chronicling his work.<sup>8</sup> They represented at the time the most comprehensive account of Wren's buildings and constituted a major addition to Wren scholarship. They are largely based on primary sources and include transcriptions of selected source material such as building accounts, vestry minutes and churchwardens' accounts, making these more widely accessible for the first time. Following the custom of their time of publication, however, they were not generously referenced. Through their exploration of the source material they show an awareness of the role of craftsmen in general, and masons in particular. They reveal the names of major craftsmen-contractors involved in Wren's buildings, among them Edward Strong and Christopher Kempster, in the context of many City churches, St Paul's Cathedral and Winchester Palace.

---

<sup>8</sup> WS.

The Wren Society volumes may be seen as part of the transition from the approach of earlier architectural historians to the more rigorous research methods influenced by the foundation of the Courtauld and Warburg Institutes in the 1930s.<sup>9</sup> John Summerson and Nikolaus Pevsner, early practitioners of this evidence-based approach, both expressed their awareness of named craftsman, Summerson to the extent of including a chapter 'Architecture and the Artisan 1615-1660' in his *Architecture in Britain*.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the mason-architect Nicholas Stone's contemporaries of whom little is known except their names, Summerson recognised the need for more research into 'the precise contribution each of them made', a demand which applies equally to masons active in the research period in hand.<sup>11</sup>

Howard Colvin, looking at architectural history with an historian's training, and Rupert Gunnis published their seminal dictionaries of architects and sculptors in the 1950s, having researched their subjects, often together, on a scientific, archival basis.<sup>12</sup> Both included many major masons, among them several of the subjects of this thesis; Colvin particularly recognising that seventeenth-century masons often performed the function of the architect. My study, in significantly extending the

---

<sup>9</sup> See Elizabeth McKellar, 'Populism versus professionalism: John Summerson and the twentieth-century creation of the 'Georgian'', in *Articulating British Classicism*, ed. by Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 35-56, and Dana Arnold, *Reading Architectural History* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 35, 42.

<sup>10</sup> *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, 9th edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993). This chapter was originally entitled 'Artisan Mannerism', and was less positive about the craftsmen's contribution.

<sup>11</sup> Summerson, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1660-1840* (London: Murray, 1954); *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851* (London: Abbey Press, 1951).

primary source base on the Burford Masons, has greatly expanded on the content of their respective entries, also unravelling errors of misattribution and family relationships found in both dictionaries.

Colvin's archive-based *History of the King's Works* detailed the execution of royal buildings, taking in the major craftsmen involved where known. Volume Five, published in 1975, contained a detailed account of the construction of Winchester Palace, designed by Wren, and involved two of the three dynasties of this study, the Stronges and Kempsters. Winchester, in this thesis, forms part of a wider investigation of contracts, mostly in the context of projects controlled by Wren. Colvin's chapter on 'Financial Stress' highlighted the dilatoriness of the Crown in paying craftsmen. The Burford Masons, however, extended their client base far beyond the Crown, and my investigation into the endemic problem of arrears of payment endeavours to show how they coped with it, carrying the research beyond Colvin's conclusions.<sup>13</sup>

The above developments illustrate how mainstream architectural history has gradually moved towards a greater awareness of the contribution of the craftsman, exposed by increasing access to primary sources. Literature specialising in the subject of craftsmen and construction practice will now be examined.

---

<sup>13</sup> *HKW*, pp. 39–46.

It is of note that already in the seventeenth century building practice was a subject frequently addressed by practitioners. Gentlemen-architects such as Sir Balthazar Gerbier, Sir Roger Pratt, and Sir Roger North, writing for those proposing to embark on a building project, offered guidance on such issues as methods of employment, costing, obtaining building materials, and model-making.<sup>14</sup> Their writings have left a benchmark from which changes in building practice can be traced. Books were also being produced by and for the craftsman, who was becoming increasingly literate. Trade manuals such as those by Joseph Moxon and Richard Neve responded to the needs of a building industry which was growing more complex, requiring craftsmen to execute more formulaic designs.<sup>15</sup> Their works serve to illustrate the craftsman's contemporary role, which Robert Campbell later consolidated by looking at individual trades.<sup>16</sup>

Coinciding with the general rise in interest in Wren, which Andrew Saint examined in 'The Cult of Wren', four architectural practitioners in the early twentieth century looked at aspects of his work from a construction history viewpoint.<sup>17</sup> They appear to have been motivated by the accessibility of building accounts, particularly

---

<sup>14</sup> B. Gerbier, *Counsel and Advise to All Builders* (London: n.pub., 1663); *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, ed. by R.T. Gunther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928); *Of Building: Roger North's Writings on Architecture*, ed. by Howard Colvin and John Newman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

<sup>15</sup> *Mechanick Exercices or the Doctrine of Handy Works* (London: n.pub., 1683); *The City and Countrey Purchaser and Builder's Directory: Or, The Compleat Builders Guide* (London: n.pub., 1703). Further information on trade manuals can be found in Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City 1660-1720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 141-146.

<sup>16</sup> *The London Tradesman* (London: Gardiner, 1747).

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Saint, 'The Cult of Wren', in *Architecture and Englishness 1880-1914*, ed. by David Crellin and Ian Dungavell (London: Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain, 2006), 37-58.

resulting from the archiving efforts of St Paul's Librarian, the Reverend W. Sparrow Simpson, and from work carried out on Wren's buildings. The earliest of these publications was by the architect J.M.W. Halley, interpreting St Paul's Cathedral building accounts in 1914, which he viewed as a source hitherto little tapped.<sup>18</sup> From these accounts, Halley illustrated aspects of building practice, noting some of the craftsmen involved. Just one year later, Lawrence Weaver, who worked in an architectural practice, was the first to publish transcripts of the building accounts for City churches lodged in the Bodleian Library, bringing this primary source to public attention.<sup>19</sup> Following shortly on in 1919, Mervyn E. Macartney, Surveyor to the Fabric of St Paul's, published brief findings arising from his restoration of the building, discussing methods of construction and comparative qualities of materials and methods of workmanship.<sup>20</sup> His empirical approach showed how certain architectural elements, in this case the pillars supporting the dome, were constructed. The fourth practitioner was W. Douglas Carøe, the architect responsible for the restoration of Tom Tower, Christ Church, Oxford. Carøe developed an interest in its original mason, Christopher Kempster, and included a brief biography of him, and comments on his Daybook, in *Wren and Tom Tower*.<sup>21</sup> Carøe brought both Kempster and his Daybook into the public domain for the first time; his findings are discussed in detail in Chapter Two and Appendix One.

---

<sup>18</sup> 'The Rebuilding and the Workmen of St Paul's Cathedral from the 'Accounts'', *RIBA Journal*, 22.3 (1914), 49-60, and 22.4 (1914), 73-82.

<sup>19</sup> 'Sir Christopher Wren's Building Accounts of City Churches', *Archaeologia*, 66, (1915) 1-60.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Renovation of St Paul's: Progress of the Works', *Architectural Review*, 45 (1919), 61-62.

<sup>21</sup> Carøe.

In the mid-1930s stonemasons came under close scrutiny by two economic historians at Sheffield University, the Freemason and Honorary Architect Douglas Knoop, and Gwilym P. Jones. Their pioneering research, based largely on primary sources, looked at the mason in medieval times, in the sixteenth, and in the seventeenth centuries.<sup>22</sup> The latter study is of particular relevance to this thesis as it focused on post-Fire London. It looked at the London Masons' Company, masons active in London at the time, and to some extent, masons' working practices. Predominantly sourcing the records of the Masons' Company which are more plentiful in this period, brief biographical details were presented on more than fifty masons, including those considered in much greater detail in this thesis. The work also raised issues for discussion, for example the questions of financing contracts, and the degree of control exercised by the Masons' Company, both of which are considered more extensively in this thesis.

My research into three masons' dynasties builds on Knoop and Jones's overview to demonstrate empirically how these particular masons operated within wider geographical parameters, and on a broader range of building types. In respect of the financing of contracts, Knoop and Jones drew broad conclusions from their inspection of bank archives. My examination of these records has been specific to the Burford Masons, linking findings to other evidence about them, with a view to gaining new insights into working practices.

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Mediaeval Mason: An Economic History of English Stone Building in the later Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1933); 'The Sixteenth-Century Mason', *AQC*, 50, (1937), 191-210; *London Mason*.



The writings of Knoop and Jones have remained in the forefront of literature on the working practices of masons. Later related studies may be seen as falling into three main categories, one looking at the craftsman in the context of a specific building type; another at the craftsman in relation to his trade and guild; and the third at masons and their dynasties. The three categories are constructs for the purposes of this thesis, their contents often overlapping.

For the first type of study, country house accounts have proved a fruitful source. In 1975 Malcolm Airs examined the role of craftsmen and their working practices in the design and construction of Elizabethan and Jacobean country houses, also analysing records to ascertain wages and working conditions.<sup>23</sup> Building on Airs, Mark Girouard explored this role in *Elizabethan Architecture*, examining masons Robert Smythson, William Arnold and John Thorpe in particular.<sup>24</sup> Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, concerned with country house building between 1660 and 1880, also took in craftsmen's working practices.<sup>25</sup> Although looking at different periods, many concerns overlap, for instance how best to obtain building materials, and the mason's role in design, issues explored in this thesis with regard to the Burford Masons. The question of the mason's role in design was taken up again by Nicholas

---

<sup>23</sup> *The Making of the English Country House 1500-1640* (London: Architectural Press, 1975), revised as *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995).

<sup>24</sup> *Elizabethan Architecture: Its Rise and Fall, 1540-1640* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House 1660-1880* (London: Hambledon, 2000).

Kingsley in respect of Gloucestershire houses.<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Beard displayed a similar awareness of the craftsman as designer in respect of the interior of country houses.<sup>27</sup> A unique analysis of early seventeenth-century masons' marks found at Apethorpe Hall, Northamptonshire, shed light on the size of Thomas Thorpe's workforce, and used marks to identify the work of those masons at other country houses.<sup>28</sup> As masons' marks shifted to less visible parts of buildings later in the century, this method of identification has produced only one example of the Burford Masons' work.

The mason's role in rebuilding the City churches and St Paul's Cathedral has also been explored in the literature. Paul Jeffery, in examining each City church built by the Wren office, identified the respective major craftsmen, acknowledging, to some extent, their contribution to the design process and the financing of the churches.<sup>29</sup> James W.P. Campbell, with an architect's experience, examined the construction history of St Paul's, especially the working practices of the various crafts employed, trade by trade. In his awareness of the collaborative nature of the project, he acknowledged the role of the mason-contractor in withstanding arrears of payment, and went on to explore the issue of their profit.<sup>30</sup> The issue of arrears, profit, and how late payments were withstood is investigated in greater depth in this thesis by

---

<sup>26</sup> *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire, Volume One 1500-1660* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> *Craftsmen and Interior Decoration in England 1600-1820* (Edinburgh: Bartholomew, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer S. Alexander and Kathryn A. Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall and the Workshop of Thomas Thorpe, Mason of King's Cliffe: A Study in Masons' Marks', *Architectural History* 50 (2007), 59-94.

<sup>29</sup> *The City Churches of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: Hambledon, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007); Campbell 'Fortune'.

scrutiny of a wider spectrum of archival material relating to the particular experience of the Burford Masons.

Looking at the mason in the context of speculative building in London, John Summerson's *Georgian London*, first published in 1945, observed the increasing capitalisation of the building industry, a theme which Elizabeth McKellar investigated, based on an analysis of a collection of property and building disputes deposited in Chancery.<sup>31</sup> Although speculative development was mainly in brick, stonemasons were also involved. McKellar looked at questions of the financing of speculative building, and building practices common to various trades. Evidence of the Burford Masons building for the speculative market is limited, however.

Turning to the second type of study focusing on craft practices rather than building types, Campbell has made significant contributions to the study of craftsmen in the seventeenth century. His paper 'The Carpentry Trade' shed light on trade guilds, contemporary methods of learning the craft, and terms of employment, much of which could equally apply to masons.<sup>32</sup> Campbell continued the theme of working practices in 'Finances of the Carpenter', including an investigation into the profits of carpenter Richard Jennings at St Paul's.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> *Georgian London* (London: Harmondsworth, 1945); McKellar, *Birth of Modern London*.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Carpentry Trade in Seventeenth-Century England', *Georgian Group Journal*, 12, (2002), 215-237.

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, 'Finances'.

Interest in the third category, the lives and works of individual masons and their dynasties, has also been steadily increasing. Most contributions are at least part biographical, some prompted by the discovery of a particular primary source which affords new insight. One study predating Knoop and Jones dealt with the Stantons of Holborn which demonstrated the breadth of activity of contemporary London masons, but, being largely biographical, shed little light on building practice.<sup>34</sup> More recent works have been published on provincial masons, the more élite masons attracting significant monographs, such as Mark Girouard's on Robert Smythson, who was active in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, and Andor Gomme's ten-year research on Smith of Warwick, a dynasty emerging in the later seventeenth century.<sup>35</sup> Both examined masons' practices in the provinces in the early modern period. Colvin had looked more briefly at Smith of Warwick in 1973.<sup>36</sup> His papers on the Bastards of Blandford, Dorset, and the Townesends of Oxford were both prompted by the discovery of fresh documentary material.<sup>37</sup> The Bastards prospered after a town fire in Blandford in a similar but much more modest way to the Burford Masons in London, its effects on their business bearing some comparison. The Townesend dynasty, like the Strongs, flourished over many generations, and had control over nearby quarries. Colvin examined their accounts, enabling him to draw conclusions about the Townesends' working practices, including the question as to how they made their profit.

---

<sup>34</sup> Mrs Arundell Esdaile, 'The Stantons of Holborn', *Archaeological Journal* 85 (1928), 149-169.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Smythson and the Architecture of the Elizabethan Era (London: Country Life, 1966), revised as *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983); *Smith of Warwick* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> H.M. Colvin, 'Francis Smith of Warwick 1672-1738', *Warwickshire History* 2 (1972/3), 3-13.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Bastards of Blandford', *Archaeological Journal*, 104 (1947), 178-195; Colvin, 'Townesends'.

Other studies of masons include those on William Byrd of Oxford, the Thorpes of Northamptonshire, and the Hiorns of Great Tew, Oxfordshire, who were the successors of Smith of Warwick's business.<sup>38</sup> Airs looked at Lawrence Shipway, an Elizabethan mason, noting the problems of surviving evidence, an issue encountered in this thesis.<sup>39</sup> These were provincial masons, two of whom were based not far from Burford. By contrast, the Burford Masons were also heavily engaged in the City of London, and their work with the foremost architects of their time provides a wider research base, over a longer period of significant change in building practices.

My research sets out to investigate the changing world of building practice as experienced by the Burford Masons, following the second line of enquiry pursued after a long hiatus by James Campbell, who has taken up the approach of Knoop and Jones and whose research falls into the period of my study. It also builds on the third category, represented particularly by Girouard, Colvin, and Gomme, in looking at the lives and achievements of the Burford Masons. Evidence arising from each of these two avenues of investigation is likely to elucidate the other. By combining these two approaches, my research aims to show the Burford Masons'

---

<sup>38</sup> Mrs. J.C. Cole, 'William Byrd, Stonecutter and Mason', *Oxoniensia* 14 (1945), 63-74.; Alexander and Morrison, pp. 59-94.; Andor Gomme, 'William and David Hiorn 1712-1776, ?-1758: The Elegance of Provincial Craftsmanship' in *The Architectural Outsiders*, ed. by Roderick Brown (London: Waterstone, 1984), pp. 45-62.

<sup>39</sup> 'Lawrence Shipway, freemason', *Architectural History* 27 (1984), 368-375.

contribution to the rebuilding of the City of London, and to major building projects of the period.

I am indebted to an observation by Colvin on quarry-based 'schools of masons' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This thesis explores this term with regard to the Burford Masons, who became purveyors of stone to London.<sup>40</sup>

## **METHODOLOGY**

It is apparent from the above that the role of master craftsmen and the exploration of their working practices have been increasingly acknowledged in architectural history. Within this recent line of enquiry the methods of my approach will now be considered.

### **Primary Sources**

In view of the scant literature on any of the Burford Masons and their working practices, research for this thesis has been largely based on original sources, many of which have not previously been explored.

Sources specific to a chapter in this thesis are discussed, like the literature, in the Introduction to the relevant chapters. The sources for this thesis generally fall into

---

<sup>40</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 16.

two main categories: the biographical, represented largely by parish records, wills, inventories, and family chronicles, and sources relating to the Burford Masons' professional lives, in particular building accounts kept by employers, records of the Masons' Company, and the Burford Masons' own business papers, the latter having remained largely untapped until now.

This thesis has benefited greatly by two recent discoveries, both of which relate to the Kempster dynasty, as mentioned above. I had the good fortune to be alerted to the resurfacing of Christopher Kempster's Daybook, lost for many decades until it was purchased by the Burford Tolsey Museum, who kindly made it available to me. A further discovery was made in 2007, when the Tolsey Museum opened a safe, the key for which had been lost, probably since the late nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup> The safe was found to contain seventeenth- and eighteenth-century property conveyances, several concerning the Kempster family. The Museum kindly notified me of this find, and allowed me generous access to the documents.

Another vital source relating to the Kempsters which has remained largely overlooked, is the Kempster v. Wigglesworth deposits in The National Archives, the most relevant comprising two boxes of disparate, but revealing papers, considered in detail in Appendix One.<sup>42</sup> Apart from Christopher Kempster's will, the contents of these boxes have not been used in the literature.

---

<sup>41</sup> Author's correspondence with the Chairman of the Burford Tolsey Museum, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> KvW.

In respect of the Strong dynasty, the principal major source has been the 'Memorandums of Works in Masonry done by Edward Strong, Senr & his family', dated 1716, but transcribed in 1740. These are the best evidence of the Strong's, examined in detail in Appendix One. The Memorandums are bound with Edward Strong junior's letter-book copies, an untapped source on his property and financial investments.

Otherwise, relevant sources examined were found to be widely dispersed, lodged in The National Archives, Kew; London Metropolitan and county record offices, in particular Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Berkshire, Hampshire, and Hertfordshire; the British Library, and libraries of Lambeth Palace, the Bodleian, and the London Guildhall; museums including the Victoria and Albert, Sir John Soane's and the Burford Tolsey; and institutions as disparate as Oxford colleges, Abingdon Borough Council, the Inner Temple, and the Bank of England. Archival material was also located in individual ownership, where access was kindly granted, for instance by the religious community then resident at Burford Priory.

The spasmodic survival of records has proved to be a particular problem, resulting at times in patchy evidence. Some records were destroyed by fire, like many London churchwardens' accounts and vestry minutes in wartime; many seventeenth-century applications for Freedom of the City perished in an accidental fire at the Guildhall in 1786; some were burnt intentionally, like most of the Kempster's business papers when the family moved from their home in 1884 after almost three



hundred years' occupation.<sup>43</sup> Flood damaged Burford's parish records when they were stored in the Diocesan Solicitor's basement in Oxford, unfortunately alphabetically (Burford falling early in the alphabet); an act of theft removed documents collected about the Strongs in Taynton.<sup>44</sup> Others remain lost, like the volume of building accounts for Tom Tower, Christ Church, Oxford, covering the period 1681-83.<sup>45</sup> In some cases gaps in evidence cannot be bridged.

Apart from their survival, the study of documents has presented some problems. Unsurprisingly, several are incomplete, at times with pages missing, or torn, obliterating key words or sentences. The legibility of handwriting varies greatly, from the clarity in the records of the various Commissions for City churches, St Paul's Cathedral, and the 'Queen Anne' churches, to the hands of struggling parishioners elected annually to keep churchwardens' accounts. The spelling in earlier documents, and in those written by less literate hands found further from London, tends to be erratic, and usually phonetic in the local dialect. This proved a particular stumbling block for Carøe, leading to misinterpretations, as discussed in Appendix One. Unlike previous scholars, I was able to consider these documents in the context of local history. Accounting practices reflected similar variations, ranging from the meticulous bookkeeping of the Bank of England and the Commissions to the unsystematic notes of payments in Christopher Kempster's Daybook.

---

<sup>43</sup> Author's correspondence with LMA, 2009; Carøe, p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> Personal comment from Oxford Diocesan Solicitor, 2007, and from current owner of the place of theft, 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Author's correspondence with Christ Church's archivist, 2006.

## Fieldwork and Networking

A further method of research has been fieldwork, visiting buildings, inspecting monuments and minor works, and photographing them for reference and comparison. Membership of The Friends of the City Churches has overcome the difficulty of access to some City churches. Research has also been advanced by correspondence with architectural historians such as Colvin, Gomme, Beard and Campbell, and with leading local historians in Burford and St Albans; also by contact with owners of buildings constructed by Burford Masons. These have generated ideas which were followed up in primary sources.

## Scope of Thesis

Turning to the scope of this thesis, the known period of continuous activity of the Strong dynasty, c.1630-1730, comfortably encompasses those of the Kempsters and Beauchamps, and has been taken as the parameter for the research period. Although this period covers the time identified by Airs as the peak of building activity in the transformation of domestic buildings in the Burford area, the concept of a Great Rebuilding as introduced by W.G. Hoskins and subsequently debated is not considered central to this study.<sup>46</sup> In the Burford Masons' home area, evidence of

---

<sup>46</sup> Airs, 'The Great Rebuilding' in *An Historical Atlas of Oxfordshire*, ed. by Kate Tiller and Giles Darkes, (n.p.: Oxfordshire Record Society, 2010), pp. 92-3; W.G Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640', *Past and Present*, 4, (1953), 44-59; see also Matthew Johnson,

their involvement with domestic buildings might have been found in Christopher Kempster's Daybook which, however, seldom identifies properties. The Burford Masons' known work outside London predominantly involved institutional and royal commissions, and country houses. In London, where they were most heavily engaged, rebuilding was a matter of necessity and urgency, not one of gradually upgrading the conditions of habitation.

Some aspects of this thesis also relate to socio-economic history, which will be discussed in the context of the economics of the changing building industry, and the careers of the masons.

Unusually in the field of architectural history, the question of style is not central to most of this thesis, as the Burford Masons generally built to the design of others. However, style becomes a consideration in Chapter Seven, which looks at the few known works of their own design, and their design input when collaborating with the architect.

### **Problems of Definition and Conventions**

The occasional problem has arisen regarding nomenclature, perhaps the most potentially confusing being the term 'builder'. The Burford Masons might, in

modern terminology, equally be seen as builders; certainly they carried out the activity of building, usually limited to masonry. However, the term 'builder' has also been used in the literature for the person commissioning building work. To avoid confusion, I have used the term 'client' for the commissioner of building. Titles with specific contemporary meanings such as 'undertaker', 'measurer', or 'freemason' are considered as they arise.

In order to distinguish the fifty-one City churches built under the 1670 Rebuilding Act from the fifty proposed under the Act of 1711, I follow the tradition of referring to them as 'City churches' and 'Queen Anne churches' respectively. In the absence of a binding convention regarding the spelling of some church names, this thesis follows that used in the *Buildings of England* series.

## **STRUCTURE OF THESIS**

Turning to the structure of the thesis, Chapter Two addresses the question of the identity of individual Burford Masons, whose experience forms the basis of this research. Together with Appendix One and the Catalogue Raisonné in Appendix Two, it sets out to produce, for the first time, a comprehensive account of the careers of their foremost members, largely based on primary sources, some hitherto untapped. It aims to correct the confusion in the literature over their identity, and to clarify problems of attribution of their works.

Chapters Three to Seven are, by contrast, thematic, each dealing with the various challenges which the Burford Masons encountered, and how they responded to them. Chapter Three centres on the Great Fire of London and the profound change which it brought about, giving rise to unprecedented opportunities for building craftsmen. It examines the motivation of the Burford Masons, as provincial operators, to enter the fray of rebuilding the City, looking at the commercial advantages of rates of pay, and a new market for their stone. It explores the question why the Burford Masons might reasonably have expected to be awarded building commissions in London, by tracing their previous connections with Wren, who played a central role in the letting of many contracts. To determine their business acumen, the chapter endeavours to ascertain, entirely from primary sources, the speed of their response to the opportunities which the Fire and the ensuing building boom presented, also examining the years before their first known commission in 1672. This is the only chapter limited to part only of the research period, specifically from the Fire in 1666 to Thomas Strong's death in 1681.

Chapters Four and Five are related, Four looking at challenges presented by the changing methods of employment, which were in the process of shifting from direct labour to the contracting system in its various forms. It explores the degree to which the Burford Masons were involved with each type. It analyses the terms of their contracts and looks at how they may have been adapted or refined over the research period. The degree of success with which the Burford Masons fulfilled those contract terms is considered. The question as to how contracts were awarded is

investigated, as are the Burford Masons' strategies to win them. Chapter Five focuses on the challenges of the emerging credit-based economy in London. It investigates the extent of arrears which the Burford Masons carried in respect of seriously late payments for their work and supply of stone by scrutinising the running of particular contracts. It looks at the level of profit mason-contractors might have expected, by reference to William Kempster's daybooks. It investigates how the Burford Masons protected themselves against the potentially damaging consequences of arrears, examining their use of capital for this purpose, and exploring other strategies which they applied to remain solvent and competitive.

Changes in the function of the London Masons' Company, particularly the extent of its control over craft practices, are examined in Chapter Six. It aims to ascertain the Burford Masons' motives for seeking membership of the Company. It looks at the degree of their commitment to it by examining their individual careers within the Company. It seeks to establish to what extent they complied with the Company's requirements.

The last thematic chapter, Seven, concerns the Burford Masons' involvement in design. It looks at their relationship with the new persona of the architect, investigating their technical contribution to the design process, and the specific functions they carried out to realise the architect's ideas. It examines the extent to which they were called upon by the architect to participate in the design process by preparing drawings, including a case study, by model-making, site supervision, and

giving specialist advice. It explores the challenges of innovative construction techniques, particularly in respect of domed buildings and cantilevered staircases.

The chapter further looks at how the Burford Masons familiarised themselves with, and adopted, the changing styles. It looks at the advantages to the designer of foreign travel and access to books in the light of the Burford Masons' experience. It questions to what extent the architect left the design of detail to Burford Masons. It examines the few buildings which can confidently be ascribed to them as mason-architects, including County Hall, Abingdon, Berkshire, which is examined as a case study. Finally, the chapter attempts to trace their influence on provincial buildings.

Appendix One enlarges on sources and biographies of the Burford Masons. The Catalogue Raisonné in Appendix Two chronicles for the first time all buildings and sculpture unquestionably by the hand of the Strong, Kempster, and Beauchamp dynasties between 1630 and 1730. Its purpose is to catalogue and to illustrate the scope of their work. It is also intended for reference particularly where buildings are not discussed in detail. Evidence for attribution is cited, along with the name of the client, and architect where applicable. The dates of work quoted have been ascertained from the sources, and do not always coincide with the construction dates for the entire building. Follow-up work like paving, chimneypieces, and repairs such as those at St Paul's Cathedral, or adding heraldic shields at Tom Tower, could engage masons on site for extended periods and are reflected in these

dates. Payment for work is stated where substantiated by primary sources, the masons' own records being used in preference to records which are likely to have been duplicated, or distorted by advance payments or the mason's own loans, a problem arising particularly in connection with the City churches and St Paul's.



## **CHAPTER TWO:**

### **THE BURFORD MASONS AND THEIR CAREERS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter introduces the principle members of the three dynasties of the Burford Masons. It is substantially augmented by Appendix One and the Catalogue Raisonné in Appendix Two. The chapter and appendices put forward the fullest account to date of the Burford Masons' careers. Collectively they present much new material, thus addressing the scarcity of information in the literature. Bringing together biographical information also serves to clear up confusion over names, which has resulted in incorrect attributions of their building work, particularly in the Kempster family. Both chapter and appendices form a body of reference for later thematic chapters.

As a means of examining the works of the foremost Burford Masons, this chapter looks at their age profiles in relation to the major opportunities they responded to, in particular the rebuilding of the City churches, their steeples, and St Paul's Cathedral, and new projects such as two royal palaces, Greenwich Hospital, and the Queen Anne churches. Living through a period of profound social change both in terms of horizontal mobility (moving from country to town) and vertical mobility (rising in status through marriage or acquisition of wealth), the Burford Masons' careers are then examined in the light of geographical mobility, wealth accumulation, and social mobility. Further details of the lives and careers of individual members are found in

Appendix One. Only their major buildings feature in this chapter, the fully referenced Catalogue Raisonné providing a comprehensive record of their evidenced works, where attributions are cited. Their careers in the London Masons Company are discussed in Chapter Six. This chapter starts with a discussion of the literature and the sources.

Both the Kempster and Strong families left some account of their work, either in the form of daybooks, financial records, or family history, which are discussed in more detail in Appendix One. Literature relating to the careers of the Stronges appears to have been largely based on the antiquarian Robert Clutterbuck's version of the 'Memorandums of Works in Masonry done by Edward Strong, Senr & his family', printed in his *History and Antiquities of the County of Hertford* in 1818.<sup>1</sup> In the 'Memorandums', Edward Strong senior set down in 1716 his recall of his and his family's works. Although they fall short of being a comprehensive account, they provide invaluable evidence in particular in respect of those works for which building accounts have not survived. As discussed in Appendix One, the Memorandums only became publicly accessible in the later twentieth century and appear to have been generally overlooked in favour of Clutterbuck's account, which at times is unreliable. This thesis scrutinises the surviving manuscript of the Memorandums, and other business and personal records such as account books and letter-book copies, which at times are invaluable.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 3 vols (London: Nichols, Son and Bentley, 1818-27), 1 (1818), 167-169.

<sup>2</sup> SM, Letter-book; GL, MS 233 Bills of Worke done at Greenwich Hospital and delivered in before they are past; RIBA, TUF/1.

Mention of the Kempster dynasty in the literature is mostly based on W. Douglas Carøe's *Tom Tower*, which enquires into Christopher Kempster as the tower's original mason-contractor.<sup>3</sup> Whilst he highlighted the Kempsters as important mason-contractors, his confusion over recurring Christian names in the family brought about errors, both in biography and attribution. As an example, Carøe credited Christopher with constructing the Geometric Staircase at St Paul's Cathedral and the sensitive repairs to its vaults, whereas the building accounts show clear evidence that Wren entrusted Christopher's son William with these important tasks.<sup>4</sup> Carøe incorrectly assumed Christopher's second son William to be his eldest, and to have been born in 1678 rather than 1651, as the parish records show.<sup>5</sup> This error was repeated by the Wren Society.<sup>6</sup>

Carøe had sight of Kempster's Daybook which was subsequently lost, resurfacing at auction only in 2003 (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> The Daybook records the Kempster family's business as quarrymen, masons and yeoman farmers in the Burford area, from around 1667 until the eighteenth century, albeit fragmentarily. Examining the Daybook for the first time in almost a century, my research has benefited greatly from its content, and from newly-found documents at the Burford Tolsey Museum relating to the Kempsters.<sup>8</sup> Other previously untapped sources relied upon include two boxes of

---

<sup>3</sup> Carøe.

<sup>4</sup> Carøe, p. 85; GL, MS 25,473/39-42.

<sup>5</sup> Burford Parish Records: ORO, MSS D.D Par/Burford c.1.

<sup>6</sup> WS, IX, (1942), 102.

<sup>7</sup> Sold by Finan & Co, Mere, Wiltshire.

<sup>8</sup> BT, Daybook; BT, D660-670.

Kempster papers held at the National Archives, which shed light in particular on William Kempster's activity in London.<sup>9</sup>

Ephraim Beauchamp is more overlooked in the literature. He is understood to be included in a privately published chronicle of the Beauchamp family entitled 'A Mark Enduring', by Peter Beauchamp, a descendant, but despite correspondence with the author, I have been unable to locate it.<sup>10</sup> Beauchamp's later paper about Ephraim's carpenter brother Benjamin makes passing mention of Ephraim.<sup>11</sup> For this thesis, evidence concerning Ephraim was largely found in primary sources, discussed below.

Knoop and Jones included brief biographical footnotes on selected members of all three dynasties, taking in Christopher and William Kempster, Ephraim Beauchamp, and of the Strongs, Thomas and the Edwards senior and junior.<sup>12</sup> Of the two seminal dictionaries published in the 1950s, Rupert Gunnis and Howard Colvin both include entries for the Strongs and Kempsters, incorporating evidence from sources additional to Clutterbuck and Carøe, the similarity of documentation cited reflecting their collaboration in research.<sup>13</sup> Only the *Dictionary of Sculptors* contains an entry on Ephraim Beauchamp, however. Their entries remain the fullest accounts of the Strongs, Kempsters, and Beauchamp to date, yet neither Dictionary is comprehensive

---

<sup>9</sup> TNA, KvW.

<sup>10</sup> Author's correspondence with Peter Beauchamp, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Beauchamp, 'The Life and Times of a C17th Westminster Builder', *Westminster History Review*, 4 (2001), 6-13.

<sup>12</sup> *London Mason*.

<sup>13</sup> *Dictionary of British Sculptors 1660-1851* (London: Abbey Press, 1951); *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1660-1840* (London: Murray, 1954).

in respect of their activity or biography.<sup>14</sup> My accounts of the Burford Masons go much further than either Dictionary, my Catalogue Raisonné incorporating many more evidenced examples of their work, thus making them the most up-to-date record.

Recently, James W.P. Campbell has looked at the individual mason-contractor teams working on St Paul's Cathedral. In his book *Building St Paul's*, Campbell touches on the Strong and the Kempster dynasties, which he expands on in his 2009 paper 'Building a Fortune'.<sup>15</sup> His two paragraphs on Thomas and Edward Strong in this paper, however, introduce little new evidence.

Problems of identity run through the literature, in respect of William Kempster in particular. He is presented as Christopher's brother rather than son by such writers as Gunnis, Ann Saunders, Paul Jeffery and even Colvin.<sup>16</sup> Anthony Geraghty was unsure as to whether William was Christopher's father or son.<sup>17</sup> Roscoe's *Dictionary of Sculptors* carries a separate entry for William as the son of Christopher, incorporating my contribution.<sup>18</sup> Campbell wrestles to disentangle members of the Kempster dynasty, correctly identifying William, mason-contractor at St Paul's, as

---

<sup>14</sup> Ingrid Roscoe, Emma Hardy and M.G. Sullivan, eds, *Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660-1851* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009); *Dictionary*.

<sup>15</sup> *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007); Campbell, 'Fortune'.

<sup>16</sup> Gunnis, p. 225; Ann Saunders, *St Paul's* (London: Collins & Brown, 2001), p. 105; Paul Jeffery, *The City Churches of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 270; *Dictionary*, p. 608.

<sup>17</sup> *The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls College, Oxford: A Complete Catalogue* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), p. 137.

<sup>18</sup> Roscoe, p. 687.

Christopher Kempster's son, but introduces new errors of identity, discussed below in the context of the family tree.<sup>19</sup>

Errors of attribution are found even in the most recent edition of Colvin's *Dictionary* which, for instance, credits Christopher with William's work on St Paul's vaults, probably following Carøe.<sup>20</sup> Colvin consistently cited St Paul's Cathedral as the repository for Kempster's Daybook, whereas the Cathedral Librarian has never found any evidence to corroborate this.<sup>21</sup> The recently revised *Dictionary of Sculptors* has disentangled many earlier errors of biography and attribution, but despite my own acknowledged input in respect of the Kempster entry, difficulties seem to have arisen in assimilating that information and disentangling Gunnis's original contents. Christopher Kempster, for instance, is wrongly credited with William's work at St Mary-le-Bow churchyard and various taverns.<sup>22</sup> Some errors travel through the literature, such as attribution for carving the marble font at St Mary Abchurch, for which 'Mr Kempster' was paid in 1686.<sup>23</sup> Jeffery, Saunders, Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner all give the font to William, however.<sup>24</sup> Christopher was the mason-contractor for rebuilding the church, doubtless warranting the title 'Mr', also there is no mention of William in the building accounts, churchwardens' accounts, or vestry minutes around this time, making William's authorship unlikely.

---

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 301.

<sup>20</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 608.

<sup>21</sup> Author's correspondence with the Cathedral Librarian, 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Roscoe, p. 686.

<sup>23</sup> Churchwardens' Accounts: GL, MS 3891/1.

<sup>24</sup> GL, MSS 25,539/4 and 3892/1; Jeffery, p. 270; Saunders, p. 105; *BOE: London: The City Churches* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 105.

A wide-ranging investigation of the source material has been made with the aim of expanding on the modest amount known about these dynasties. In addition to Christopher Kempster's recently resurfaced Daybook, the Kempster papers at The National Archives and the Burford Tolsey Museum, and the Strong Memorandums, this investigation has involved examining building accounts, bank archives, and personal documents such as wills, inventories, conveyances, mortgages, bonds, and insurance assignments among other disparate records. Also vital were parish registers, the recording of baptisms, marriages and burials being a relatively recent introduction, starting in Burford only in 1612. Their script is of varying legibility, entries are often disrupted during the Commonwealth, and their survival has been haphazard. As there still is no central comprehensive catalogue of the contents of all parish registers, the thread of family names can be difficult to trace in different parishes. All relevant surviving parish registers have been examined in the Oxfordshire/Gloucestershire area. Appendix One expands on these primary sources, in particular the Strong Memorandums and the Kempster Daybook, and discusses unpublished literature.

This chapter now turns to look at the careers of the Burford Masons, starting with their place of origin. The geographical location of Burford and its proximity to Oxford, London and the River Thames which was vital for the transportation of stone from the Burford quarries can be seen in Figure 2. Figure 3 illustrates the geology of the Burford area, showing the location of the quarry villages of Taynton and Upton ('Kit's Quarries'), the origin of the Burford Masons' dynasties, and nearby Little

Barrington, where the Strongs leased a further quarry. The Strongs are known to have worked the quarries at Little Barrington since at least the early seventeenth century, continuing their masonry business which had already been established in Wiltshire.<sup>25</sup> The Kempsters, despite having access to their quarry in Upton from an even earlier date, do not appear to have exploited it until the market for stone opened up in London after the Great Fire. Until then, the Kempsters' main livelihood appears to have been that of yeoman farmers, like their neighbours the Beauchamps.

A timeline showing the lifespans of the Burford Masons is shown in Figure 4. Family trees have been prepared showing the masons of each dynasty, which are the most comprehensive, and in the case of the Beauchamps, the first attempted. Colvin, in the third edition only of his *Dictionary*, includes a family tree for the Strongs, which limits itself to Edward and John's line.<sup>26</sup> Figure 5 presents a more representational Strong family tree, incorporating eleven more masons, eight of whom worked in London. The Kempster family tree (Figure 6) has been built up from primary sources, some newly-available or untapped. Campbell, in his 2009 paper, sets out a 'first published version' of the Kempster family tree.<sup>27</sup> However, in seeking to flesh it out, Campbell corrects some of the errors which have travelled through the literature, but creates new confusions of names and dates in respect of Christopher's father, children, and grandchildren, many of whom were masons. Campbell makes no mention of Christopher's son Edmund, nor of his sons-in-law Thomas Hands and

---

<sup>25</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>26</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 3rd edn (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 935.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', pp. 300-301.



Richard Richards, all of whom were masons in the family firm. He comments on the Kempsters' 'annoying habit' of naming 'most of their sons Christopher or William', an observation not literally correct, but indicative of the problem of unravelling individuals of the same names within the family. Dynastic first names were not unusual in stonemasons' families, occurring for instance in the Peisleys of Oxford, or the Stantons of Holborn. The Beauchamp family tree is shown in Figure 7.

### **GENERATIONS OF BURFORD MASONS**

The Strongs, spanning at least six generations, were active significantly the longest of the Burford Masons, twice the duration of the Kempsters and three times that of the Beauchamps. Thomas and the Edward Strongs senior and junior, Christopher and William Kempster, and Ephraim Beauchamp were the masons of greatest note in these dynasties.

Already from the first identifiable generation of the Strongs, their works show familiarity with the incoming styles. As early as 1631 Timothy Strong and his son Valentine were introducing classical ideas to Oxfordshire, building the south front of Cornbury Park (Figure 8) to Nicholas Stone's designs, going on to Canterbury Quadrangle, St John's College, Oxford (Figure 9), around 1634-5. The prestige of the client, and the significance of the commission as one of the earliest attempts in the country at a classical country house front, strongly suggests earlier work of some

standing by the Stronges, evidence for which has not been found.<sup>28</sup> Valentine continued to work at the cutting-edge of architectural style during the Interregnum, building country houses at Sherborne (1651-3), Lower Slaughter (1656-8) and Fairford (1660-1), all in Gloucestershire (Figures 10, 11 and 12). His design input with these innovative houses is considered in Chapter Seven. Valentine's son Thomas, the third generation of Stronges, also was engaged at Cornbury, carrying out Hugh May's designs for the stables between 1663-4 and the east wing between 1665-7 (Figure 13), the latter contemporaneous with his contract to build the north side of Garden Quad, Trinity College, Oxford, to Christopher Wren's designs (Figure 14). This is the first certain link between any of the Burford Masons and Wren, which was to become a vital association explored in Chapter Three.

By contrast, little is known of the work during these years of Christopher Kempster, Thomas Strong's contemporary, other than small masonry jobs. It is likely, however, that Christopher trained and continued to work with the Stronges, also gaining experience in the new styles. Appendix One looks at these early years, including apprenticeships.

The Great Fire of London was the catalyst to change the fortunes of the Burford Masons, opening up unprecedented opportunities for building and for selling their quarrrystone. Wren, holding a central part in the rebuilding, was familiar with their

---

<sup>28</sup> Jennifer Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: Oxfordshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 553.

expertise and increasingly commissioned them, making them some of his most important master masons.

### **City church rebuilding**

Christopher Kempster was already forty years old when he went to London, Thomas Strong some five years' younger. Both were mature masons capable of taking on rebuilding contracts after the Great Fire. It was, however, five years before they were awarded their first known contract in London, for rebuilding St Stephen Walbrook, in 1672. Chapter Three enquires into their activity in London during the intervening period. The wait proved worthwhile, as St Stephen Walbrook was to be a highly prestigious and innovative church, the first domed church in England (Figure 15).<sup>29</sup> This important commission was the first of thirty-two contracts which Burford Masons took on for City churches. Christopher went on to take three further rebuilding contracts in his own name, for St James Garlickhythe (1677-86), St Mary Abchurch (1681-7), St Mary Somerset (1685-95), and the contract to repair the tower of St Mary-at-Hill in 1695. Inspection of the building accounts did not, however, substantiate Geoffrey Beard's claim that Christopher Kempster was mason-contractor for St Martin Ludgate.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> RCHME, *The City of London Churches* (London: Collins & Brown, 1998), p. 212.

<sup>30</sup> GL, MS 25,549/3; *The Work of Christopher Wren* (London: Bloomsbury, 1987), p. 75; author's correspondence with Geoffrey Beard, February 2005.

Thomas Strong did not live to see St Stephen Walbrook or any of his London contracts completed, as he died in his late forties in 1681. He took on two further City church rebuilding contracts as sole contractor, for St Benet Paul's Wharf in 1678, and St Augustine Old Change two years later. Campbell credits Thomas with rebuilding three further churches: St Clement Eastcheap, St Mary Magdalen Old Fish Street, and St Michael Cornhill, citing the Wren Society and the *London Mason* as evidence.<sup>31</sup> Building accounts, however, show that work on St Clement's and St Mary's started in 1682 and 1683 respectively, postdating Thomas's death and were built by his brother Edward instead, whose contract for St Clement's has survived; the third, St Michael Cornhill, the rebuilding of which started in 1669, predates Thomas's freedom, and is recorded to have been built by Nicholas Young.<sup>32</sup> The Memorandums make no mention of these churches being by Thomas's hand. The Wren Society reflects the building accounts, showing Nicholas Young as mason for St Michael Cornhill, and Thomas Strong's successor Edward senior as mason-contractor for the other two churches.<sup>33</sup> The *London Mason* makes no reference to these churches on the page cited, which outlines Thomas Strong's career.

Edward senior, Thomas's younger brother by some twenty years, purchased his freedom of the London Masons' Company by redemption in 1680, opportune, as it turned out, to take on Thomas's contracts the following year.<sup>34</sup> Of all the Burford Masons, it is Edward senior whose age and family connections enabled him to

---

<sup>31</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 300.

<sup>32</sup> GL, MSS 25,542/2, fol. 161; 25,539/4; 25,539/2, fols 109-114.

<sup>33</sup> WS, x (1933), 48, 50.

<sup>34</sup> GL, MS 5301/1, fol. 41: Masons' Company Court Minutes.

embrace the post-Fire building boom to greatest advantage. He built on Thomas's thriving City practice, becoming one of the most active mason-contractors in the City and the most renowned of the Strong family. The year in which Thomas died, Edward is found deputising as mason-contractor for Samuel Fulkes at St Mary Aldermary, having recently cleared the debris at St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe. In 1681 he took over Thomas's three City church contracts, and was soon awarded five more, being St Mildred Bread Street (1681-7), St Clement East Cheap (1682-7), St Mary Magdalen, Old Fish Street (1683-7), St Michael Paternoster Royal (1685-8), and St Vedast alias Foster (1695-9), where he was obliged to take on parishioner William Collins as partner.<sup>35</sup> Also in 1695, Edward took on the steeple contract for St Augustine Old Change.

The Beauchamps were the latest dynasty of Burford Masons to make their mark in the London rebuilding. Ephraim Beauchamp is first noted in London in 1684, when he purchased his freedom of the Masons' Company.<sup>36</sup> By this time, the City church rebuilding campaign had in the main run its course, the last five contracts being embarked upon by 1686. By the 1690s, repairs carried out to some churches shortly after the Fire by parish vestries rather than the Wren office were beginning to show deficiencies, and presented further rebuilding opportunities.<sup>37</sup> In 1695 Ephraim embarked on St Dunstan-in-the-East, his only City church contract, repairing the

---

<sup>35</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>36</sup> GL, MS 5313: Masons' Company Quarterededge Book.

<sup>37</sup> Jeffery, pp. 49, 51.

church and constructing a new tower and distinctive crown steeple (Figure 16), and a new vestry.<sup>38</sup>

### **St Paul's Cathedral**

Starting in 1675, the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral continued for some forty years, offering contracting opportunities to several generations of Burford Masons. The first masons' contracts for St Paul's Cathedral were let in 1675, Thomas Strong being awarded one, Joshua Marshall, the King's Master Mason, taking the other. It was Thomas, however, who, according to the Memorandums, 'layed the first stone in the Foundation thereof [St Paul's] with his own hands'.<sup>39</sup> This was the first of many contracts for rebuilding St Paul's given to the Strongs until the following century. Having worked with Thomas already on the foundations at St Paul's, Edward senior went on to inherit his contract in 1681, continuing at St Paul's until the 'last stone' was laid upon the dome in 1708, Edward junior having constructed its lantern.<sup>40</sup> Edward junior continued to be engaged at St Paul's until at least 1715, laying marble paving, and carrying out repair work.<sup>41</sup> The Strongs, Thomas and Edward senior and junior, were the only firm to see the building of St Paul's through from inception to official completion, and are the only mason-contractors named on a commemorative plaque in the crypt, above Wren's tomb (Figure 17).

---

<sup>38</sup> GL, MS 25,539/8.

<sup>39</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>40</sup> Edward Strong's epitaph; SM, Letter-book.

<sup>41</sup> SM, Letter-book.

Christopher Kempster was already sixty-three when he and his partner Ephraim Beauchamp took over Edward Pierce's contract at St Paul's in 1690. Their contract was for the south section of the choir, going on to build a quarter of the drum of the dome.<sup>42</sup> Ephraim was only twenty-nine years old at this point, and probably brought the necessary energy and finance to the partnership. His wealth, acquired relatively early in life, probably enabled him to partner the very much older Christopher Kempster as mason-contractor at St Paul's at a time when skills were paramount and payment tardy. By 1694 Strong, and Kempster and Beauchamp were employing by far the largest of the six mason-contracting teams on site.<sup>43</sup> Kempster and Beauchamp were to remain engaged at St Paul's for seventeen years, by the end of which Christopher was aged eighty.

Some seven years before Kempster and Beauchamp took the masonry contract at St Paul's, Beauchamp had been acting as a stone merchant for it.<sup>44</sup> This indicates that Beauchamp had already forged an association with St Paul's, probably working in his brother-in-law Edward Strong's team.

William Kempster was almost fifty when he was awarded his contract at St Paul's. William's name is found heading the list in John Thompson's team in the Masons' Company Search of 1694, indicating he was the foreman.<sup>45</sup> When Thompson died in 1700, the Commission for rebuilding St Paul's chose William to take over his contract

---

<sup>42</sup> GL, MS 25,471/34, St Paul's Cathedral Building Accounts; WS, XVI, 66. GL, MS 25,473/25, fol. 38 shows the last entry for Pierce on 28 February 1689/90. WS, XIV, 66, records the success of Ephraim Beauchamp's petition to take over Pierce's contract.

<sup>43</sup> GL, MS 5304/1.

<sup>44</sup> GL, MS 25,575/2.

<sup>45</sup> GL, MS 5304/1 Masons' Court Minutes.

on the south-west tower.<sup>46</sup> This, William's first known contract, was one of the most prestigious of that time. By 1705 he had completed the structurally challenging Geometric Staircase in the tower, and the sculpture of scrolls, wreaths and cherubs' heads over the Dean's Door (Figures 18 and 19).<sup>47</sup> Between 1707 and 1709 William, at Wren's insistence, was entrusted to lead a large team of masons repairing the 'Flaws and Defects in the Vaults', which included refacing the great piers in the crypt carrying the weight of the dome. Wren, in a statement defending his choice of William, declared the work 'requir'd great Care, Skill and Caution in the Performance of it', and he would not entrust it to a foreman but 'directed that the Master (the said William Kempster) should duly and constantly attend'.<sup>48</sup> Later at St Paul's, together with Joshua Fletcher, he was awarded the joint contract for the windows below the dome in 1715, and finally for the controversial balustrade, but William died before work could start.<sup>49</sup>

### **Contemporaneous work outside London:**

Eleven years after starting their first contract in London, Christopher Kempster and Edward Strong senior were awarded their first royal contract, to lay foundations for the king's new palace at Winchester, Hampshire (1683-5). Above ground, they took two of the five contracts for the stonework, Edward for the central, east block,

---

<sup>46</sup> GL, 5304/1; WS, XVI (1939), 99.

<sup>47</sup> GL, MS 25,473/39, fol. 134.

<sup>48</sup> *Second Part of Fact against Scandal: In Answer to a Pamphlet intituled a Continuation of Frauds and Abuses at St Paul's*, ed. by John Morphew (London: Morphew, 1713), p. 76.

<sup>49</sup> WS, XVI (1939), 99.



Christopher the west wing (Figure 20). This remained the Kempsters' only royal commission, whereas the Strongs were to take on another in 1705, for the main pile at Blenheim Palace (Figure 21).

Significant opportunities in the provinces also arose through institutional clients.

Christopher Kempster's first known important contract in the provinces was awarded in 1678, for Abingdon's County Hall in Berkshire (Figure 22), which is examined as a case study in Chapter Seven. Three years later, in connection with Bishop Fell's proposals to build Tom Tower, Christ Church, Oxford (Figures 23 and 24), Wren drew his attention to County Hall in strongly recommending Christopher Kempster as mason-contractor. It is from Wren's letters to Fell that some insight is gleaned into Kempster's personal qualities, and the esteem in which Wren held him in comparison with Oxford masons. Wren wrote on 26 May 1681 (Figure 25):

I cannot boast of Oxford Artists though they have a good opinion of themselves. My L<sup>d</sup> with submission I have thought of a very able Man, modest, honest and Treatable, and one that your masons will submit to worke with because of his interest in the Quarries at Burford, & therefore you will have the stone from him at first hand. His Name X<sup>topher</sup> Kempster, he wrought the Town house at Abbingdon and goeing now to the Quarrie, I perswaded him to returne by Oxford & wait upon Your L<sup>p</sup>. I have used him in good workes and he is very carefull to worke trew to his designe and strong well banded worke, & I can rely upon him, I have talked with him & indeed promised to recomend him to Y<sup>r</sup> L<sup>p</sup>

& I am confident he will promise little advantage to himselfe soe he may have the honor of the Worke.<sup>50</sup>

In 1687 Christopher built a further work of note in the provinces, the side chapel known as the Perrott aisle at St Mary's, North Leigh, Oxfordshire (Figure 26). This, the only building the design of which has been firmly attributed to him by Colvin, demonstrates Christopher's familiarity with London City churches, showing him transmitting metropolitan styles to the provinces.<sup>51</sup> This aspect is explored in Chapter Seven.

### **City church steeples**

By the time Edward Strong junior was free and able to take on contracts, the City church rebuilding programme was completed, but its steeple campaign remained. Edward was awarded eight steeple contracts, for Christ Church Newgate Street (1703-4), St Vedast alias Foster and St Christopher-le-Stocks, both starting 1709, St Michael Crooked Lane (1711-14), St Stephen Walbrook and St Michael Paternoster Royal, both starting 1713, and St James Garlickhythe and St Michael Cornhill, commencing 1715.

William Kempster was also of an age to benefit from the steeple campaign. William's daybooks at The National Archives show him working on at least nine City churches,

---

<sup>50</sup> CCM, MS 376.

<sup>51</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 608.

particularly rebuilding the steeples of St Edmund the King and Martyr (1706-7), St Michael Bassishaw and St Margaret Pattens, both starting 1712.<sup>52</sup> He carried out repairs to many other City churches around this time, such as St Mary-le-Bow, St Michael Queenhythe, St Mary Abchurch, All Hallows the Great, St Alban Wood Street, and intermittently to his own parish church of St James Garlickhythe.

### **Queen Anne churches**

An Act of Parliament passed in 1711 created another opportunity, to build churches in the suburbs of London known as the 'Queen Anne' churches. This was in response to the perceived threat of growing non-conformism in these areas.<sup>53</sup> Edward Strong junior soon became heavily involved in the programme. Of the twelve churches actually built, he constructed half, embarking on St Alfege, Greenwich, St John Smith Square, and St Paul, Deptford in 1713, St Anne, Limehouse and St George-in-the-East, Wapping the following year, and St George, Bloomsbury in 1716. All were joint contracts with Edward Tufnell until his death in 1719, after which Edward junior continued on his own. Also with Tufnell he embarked in 1714 upon the 250-foot pillar in the Strand which was to support a statue of Queen Anne, abandoned upon the Queen's death later that year.<sup>54</sup> With partner Christopher Cass, Edward junior completed St George, Hanover Square (1724), and St Luke Cripplegate (1728).

---

<sup>52</sup> TNA, KvW.

<sup>53</sup> Kerry Downes, *Hawksmoor* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p. 104.

<sup>54</sup> *The Commission for Building the Fifty New Churches*, ed. by M.H. Port, (n.p.: London Record Society, 1986), p. 93.

Between 1717 and 1729 he went on to build five ministers' houses for the parishes at Deptford, Wapping, Bloomsbury, Cornhill and Westminster.

Of Christopher Kempster's sons in London, William was already sixty years of age with a thriving City masons' business when the 1711 Act was passed. Edmund Kempster, however, was of an age to work on the Queen Anne churches, but did not take on any of the contracts, unlike his contemporary Edward Strong junior. Edmund's absence in the campaign may be reflective of the Strongs' superior financial position in an age when payment was unreliable.

### **Greenwich Hospital**

In 1696 tenders were invited for constructing the foundations of a hospital for seamen at Greenwich. The first contract was let to Edward Strong senior, then only forty-four, in partnership with Thomas Hill, both masons concurrently running contracts at St Paul's. Three years later, Edward senior took his next contract at Greenwich Hospital in partnership with his brother-in-law Ephraim Beauchamp, and his own son Edward Strong junior, who had only recently completed his apprenticeship.<sup>55</sup> To be included as contractor of a prestigious contract at a very early age doubtless improved Edward junior's professional credentials. The joint contract was the start of a long period of

---

<sup>55</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, fol. 33.

engagement at the Hospital, Edward junior taking on contracts at the Hospital until 1729.<sup>56</sup>

## **GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY**

Age profile also played a part in geographical mobility. By the time Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster went up to London, they had already spent almost an average lifetime in the Burford area, where they had family roots. Despite the fourteen years Thomas worked in London, he remained committed to his family and community in Taynton and Little Barrington, leaving bequests in his will not only to his family but to the church and the poor of the parish.<sup>57</sup> He is buried in Taynton churchyard.

Christopher was engaged in the City for some forty years, yet never settled in London. Whilst working in the capital, he returned when possible to his family in Burford, participating in parish life. Christopher's purchase of the freehold of his family home in 1694 is further evidence of his commitment to his home area (Figure 27).<sup>58</sup> Christopher spent his retirement years in Burford, where he is buried. In his will he, too, remembered the poor of his home parish.<sup>59</sup> Appendix One examines his presence in Burford in greater detail.

---

<sup>56</sup> WS VI (1929), 40.

<sup>57</sup> TNA, PROB 11/367.

<sup>58</sup> BT, D660-662.

<sup>59</sup> TNA, KvW.

The next generation of Burford Masons went up to London at a much younger age, as yet unmarried and ready to establish a new life elsewhere. Some of the Strong dynasty returned to practise in Oxfordshire or Berkshire after completing their apprenticeships, such as John and Timothy, who set up in Stanford-in-the-Vale. Some of the most important Burford Masons stayed on to work in the capital, never to return, like Edward Strong senior, William and Edmund Kempster, and Ephraim Beauchamp. With this, the firms' base split.

William Kempster, having worked in London since at least 1671, remained, operating his successful City masons' business from Garlick Hill.<sup>60</sup> He is buried in his parish church built by his father, St James Garlickhythe.<sup>61</sup> Edward Strong senior retired to St Albans, Hertfordshire, to New Barnes manor house, now Sopwell House (Figure 28).<sup>62</sup> This had been in his son-in-law Robert New's family. Edward's earlier property dealings in that town with New suggest that he was already living in St Albans by 1705, operating his London business from there.<sup>63</sup> Edward Strong junior moved to Greenwich, retaining, until his death, the lease of a house on St Peter's Hill, London, part of the wing of the College of Arms which his brother-in-law Ephraim Beauchamp had built in 1688 and bequeathed to him.<sup>64</sup>

Ephraim Beauchamp, having lived in London in Knight Rider Street, moved to

---

<sup>60</sup> City churches rebuilding accounts: GL, MS 25,539; London Rate Assessments 1681: GL, MS 9801.

<sup>61</sup> GL, MS 25,539/2.

<sup>62</sup> BL, *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 15 February 1724, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *St Albans 1650-1700*, ed. by J.T. Smith and M.A. North (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2003), p. 206.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PROB 11/596; Bodl., MS Top. Herts. c.2; TNA, Letter-book.

Tottenham High Cross, Middlesex, living at Crokes Farm, later known as White Hall (Figure 29).<sup>65</sup> He later moved to Hertford, living in the Brickenden Liberty.<sup>66</sup>

## WEALTH ACCUMULATION

Age was also a factor in wealth accumulation. At a time when life expectancy averaged some forty-four years only, Christopher Kempster enjoyed twice that lifespan, dying in his eighty-ninth year. Edward Strong senior achieved seventy-two years, William Kempster and Ephraim Beauchamp both reached the age of sixty-seven, and Edward Strong junior sixty-five. Contemporary statistics have shown longevity to be a major factor in the accumulation of wealth, enabling successful businessmen to build up significant wealth if they lived to the age of sixty or over.<sup>67</sup> Apart from William Kempster who worked until he died, also as a rich man, all these Burford Masons accrued enough wealth to cease work and live on their investments.

The sums which Thomas Strong bequeathed in 1681, one hundred pounds each to his brother Valentine and sisters Anne, Sarah and Lucy, and fifty pounds to his brother William, compare favourably with his father Valentine's more modest bequests twenty years earlier of five shillings apiece to his six sons and five daughters, illustrating the wealth which Thomas had acquired in London.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Robinson, p. 124.

<sup>66</sup> GL, MS 5313; TNA, PROB 11/624.

<sup>67</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), pp. 310, 141, 347.

<sup>68</sup> Will of Thomas Strong: TNA, PROB 11/367; Will of Valentine Strong, TNA, PROB 11/309.

Edward Strong senior's financial success is reflected in his extensive acquisition of property, which upon his death included at least eighteen investment properties in London, some possibly resulting from speculative development, and others in and around St Albans, Hertfordshire, where he had acquired several landed estates including South Mimms, Wheathampstead, and Abbot's Langley. He also retained family property in Burford, and in Little Barrington and Rissington in Gloucestershire.<sup>69</sup> Whilst some contemporary masons' dynasties also amassed wealth, such as William Townesend of Oxford, who earned what a contemporary Oxford chronicler described as 'a vast deal of money', there were others who descended into bankruptcy, like William Stanton of Holborn in 1735.<sup>70</sup> Although Strong's properties are not valued, his estate upon death would appear to compare favourably with that of Edward Pierce, a fellow mason-contractor at St Paul's, who claimed in a memorandum which was proved as his will that he was worth £2516 when he died in 1695, less than £200,000 in today's money.<sup>71</sup> Both the Townesends and the Stronges were quarry-owners, unlike the Stantons or Pierce. The commercial and professional advantages of quarry-owning are explored in Chapter Three.

Like his father, Edward junior amassed extensive land and property, including houses in Holborn, Whitechapel and Wapping, and farms in Middlesex, Hertfordshire, Kent, and Lincolnshire. The archives of the Bank of England show something of his

---

<sup>69</sup> Will of Edward Strong snr: TNA, PROB 11/596.

<sup>70</sup> *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. by C.E. Doble, Oxford Historical Society, 11 vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885-1921), 1 (1906), p. 171; *Dictionary*, p. 976.

<sup>71</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 793.



monetary wealth, recording £12,500 in annuities, plus £9000 in Bank of England managed stock, equating to nearly three million pounds today.<sup>72</sup>

William Kempster's estate is unknown, but when his wife died four years after him, she was described in a sworn statement as 'possessed of a very considerable personal estate consisting in ready money, securities for money, plate, jewels household goods and other things amounting to a very great value'.<sup>73</sup>

Ephraim Beauchamp, in 1695, some twelve years after his arrival in London, was assessed as wealthy enough to be subject to payment of surtax, the threshold for which was possession of a personal estate of the value of at least six hundred pounds.<sup>74</sup> A year earlier, with the help of a mortgage, he was able to buy his first estate in Tottenham High Cross, Middlesex, for £3100.<sup>75</sup> Ephraim consolidated his landholding in the area by buying up nearby agricultural estates, one in 1708, also at Tottenham High Cross, for £2000, and another in 1714 at Monken Hadley, comprising three farms.<sup>76</sup> Ephraim Beauchamp's house at Crokes Farm was large, being taxed on twenty-one hearths in 1664, which compares very favourably with the Kempsters' three hearths at Upton.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Will of Edward Strong jnr: TNA, PROB 11/713; Stocks: BEA, M 1/97.

<sup>73</sup> TNA, PRO C 11/2588/44.

<sup>74</sup> *London Inhabitants*, p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> William Robinson, *History and Antiquities of the Parish of Tottenham in the County of Middlesex*, 2 vols (London: Nicholls, 1840), I, 80.

<sup>76</sup> BL, Acc 564/141; VCH, *Middlesex v* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 264.

<sup>77</sup> VCH, *Middlesex v*, p. 332; Maureen Weinstock, ed., *Hearth Tax Returns Oxfordshire 1665*, vol. 21 (Oxford: Oxfordshire Record Society, 1940), p. 233.

Christopher Kempster, despite living longer than any other Burford Mason, did not amass great property or wealth. Instead of moving to a more imposing house, he appears to have built on a modest wing to his farmhouse in 1698, and the few dwellings he is known to have acquired were gifted to members of his family.<sup>78</sup> The sharp contrast between his wealth and that of other successful Burford Masons might be put down to Christopher's relatively late age when he achieved success in London.

## **SOCIAL MOBILITY**

Wealth was the primary means to social mobility. The Burford Masons' acquisition of land, as well as securing investment, also served to elevate their status, an issue explored in Chapter Five. It may be that the choice of estates which brothers-in-law Edward Strong senior and Ephraim Beauchamp purchased in South Hertfordshire and North Middlesex, only five miles distant from each other, was also motivated by their desire to build on the prestige of their shared family heritage, Beauchamps having been landowners in the area as early as the fourteenth century.<sup>79</sup>

The Burford Masons' use of personal titles gives some indication of their social mobility. Ephraim Beauchamp was the first Burford Mason known to describe himself as 'gentleman', in a conveyance of 1708.<sup>80</sup> Some twenty years earlier, Gregory King had noted the rank of gentleman to be above that of clergymen and

---

<sup>78</sup> BT, D660-670.

<sup>79</sup> VCH, *Middlesex* v, p. 332.

<sup>80</sup> Conveyance of property in Tottenham High Cross: LMA, ACC 564/141.

'persons in the law'.<sup>81</sup> Although its definition was flexible at this time, the title 'gentleman' appears to have recognized wealth and landholding, and the wherewithal to 'live freely and handsomely', indicating that the titleholder was no longer working.<sup>82</sup> In his will of 1712, Christopher Kempster described himself as 'gentleman', in contrast to the yeoman he was born.<sup>83</sup> The first Strong to use the title was Edward senior, in 1716.<sup>84</sup> Only two Burford Masons described themselves in documents as 'esquire', Ephraim Beauchamp in 1712 and Edward Strong junior in 1728.<sup>85</sup> King placed the rank of esquire immediately below that of knight, although it may be that usage had become more flexible since his writing in 1696.

The society in which they moved also reflected their rising social status. Edward junior was the first and only Burford Mason to follow the growing trend for gentlemen to widen their education by travel abroad. On at least two occasions he journeyed on the Continent. The first time was probably in early 1699 after completing his apprenticeship, in the company of Wren's son Christopher junior. Wren's letter to his son on their travels highlights the comparative interest of Edward junior in the architecture they encountered.<sup>86</sup> In 1711, he travelled to the Low Countries, accompanied by his brother Thomas and Sir James Thornhill, who was the

---

<sup>81</sup> Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 52, citing Gregory King, *A scheme of income and expence of the several families of England calculated for the year 1688*.

<sup>82</sup> Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p. 9; Hoppit, p. 74, citing Guy Miège, *New State of England under our Present Monarch K. William III* (4th edn., 1702), part 2, p. 152.

<sup>83</sup> TNA, KvW.

<sup>84</sup> HRO, 1.0.25, assignment of Herons Manor.

<sup>85</sup> *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, xi, 211; HRO, 44735: indenture for Napsbury Farm, Hertfordshire; Hoppit, p. 52.

<sup>86</sup> WS, XIX, 119.

decorative artist at Greenwich Hospital (1708-12) and later at Blenheim Palace (1716) and St Paul's Cathedral (1716-19).<sup>87</sup> On this tour, Edward junior was introduced to Prince Eugene of Savoy at his levée in The Hague. The importance of travel to the designer of buildings is explored in Chapter Seven.

Both Edward senior and junior became involved in the new movement of Masonic Lodges, Edward senior as early as 1685, when, according to William Preston, he became Warden to 'Grand Master' Sir Christopher Wren.<sup>88</sup> Upon his death in 1724, the *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* referred to him as 'one of the ancientest Masons and FREEMASONS in England'.<sup>89</sup> A portrait at Freemasons' Hall presented by one of his descendants depicts Edward senior holding a part-unfurled plan which may be that of St Paul's, and a pair of dividers and a set square, symbols of his own trade as well as those of Freemasonry (Figure 30).<sup>90</sup> Edward junior is recorded in 1725 as a member of Lodge no 25 which met at The Swan Tavern, East Street, Greenwich, being still a member in 1631.<sup>91</sup> Members of this Lodge included Sir James Thornhill, and architect John James. Chapter Six explores the Strongs' involvement in Freemasonry.

As might be expected of men of substantial property at the time, both the Edward Strongs senior and junior, and Ephraim Beauchamp, took on public responsibilities.

---

<sup>87</sup> BL, Add.MS 34,788, Sir James Thornhill's Diary.

<sup>88</sup> William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry*, 9th edn (London: Wilkie, 1795), iv.

<sup>89</sup> BL, 15 February 1724, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> GA, P.141 MI 2/4, Hodges collection.

<sup>91</sup> Quatuor Coronatorum Antigrapha Masonic Reprints, x, a.

By 1701 Ephraim was already a Governor of Bethlem and Bridewell Royal Hospitals, the latter by this time chiefly used as a prison.<sup>92</sup> In the same year, Edward Strong senior was appointed a governor of St Bartholomew's Hospital, indicating that he was a significant benefactor, Edward junior following his father's footsteps as Governor in 1729.<sup>93</sup> Ephraim, in 1710, was noted as one of the nine trustees of the Free Grammar School at Tottenham High Cross, and according to his epitaph became a governor of Christ's Hospital, where, with Edward Strong, he advised on the 'ruinous' condition of the cloisters.<sup>94</sup> In 1712 Ephraim became a Commissioner of Sewers for Tower Hamlets, one of forty-seven, all entitled 'esquire'.<sup>95</sup>

The wealth which some of the later Burford Masons accrued enabled their descendents to marry up into the gentry and aristocracy, the very society they had previously worked for, and in the case of the Stronges, the very family they had worked for. Edward junior's daughters married up into the gentry, two of them becoming titled and are depicted, with Edward junior and his wife, in Charles Philips' conversation piece of 1732 (Figure 31). The interior shown should not be assumed to be that of Edward junior's house, however, as another family conversation piece by Philips, *Tea Party at Lord Harrington's House, St James's*, painted 1720, shows a similar decor. Philips went on to become a court painter, commissioned by the Prince

---

<sup>92</sup> Bethlem Royal Hospital Archives: Minutes of the Court of Governors 1701, fol. 419.

<sup>93</sup> *British Journal or The Censor*, 30 August 1792, p. 2; SBHA, SBHB/HB/S/1, Registries of Legacies and Benefactors.

<sup>94</sup> WS, XI (1934), 79.

<sup>95</sup> *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (London: HMSO, 1887), xi, 211.

and Princess of Wales in 1737.<sup>96</sup> Edward junior's great-grandson went on to marry the daughter of the fourth Duke of Marlborough, descendent of his former client at Blenheim Palace.

A similar pattern of social change in the artificer class through vertical mobility can be found in the Smith of Warwick dynasty, Francis's grandson marrying into aristocratic circles.<sup>97</sup> Ephraim's line was aggrandised posthumously through Thomas's son William who, as a condition of inheritance on his mother's side, assumed the surname of Beauchamp-Proctor and was soon after created a baronet.<sup>98</sup> Another conversation piece of 1749 by the painter John Wootton at the Castle Museum, Norwich, shows Ephraim's grandson Sir William Beauchamp-Proctor at his Palladian mansion Langley Hall in Norfolk (Figure 32).<sup>99</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It has been seen that age profile played an important part in the Burford Masons' careers, their respective ages when major opportunities arose proving significant. Longevity was also found to be a factor in their accumulation of wealth, and social rise. The similar longevity of their contemporary Wren made for a remarkable

---

<sup>96</sup> Katharine Baetjer, *British Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1575-1875* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 52.

<sup>97</sup> Andor Gomme, *Smith of Warwick* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000) p. 87.

<sup>98</sup> RCHM, *Report on the Family and Estate Papers of the Beauchamp-Proctor (later Proctor-Beauchamp) Family, Baronets of Langley 1380-1899* (London: RCHM, 1977).

<sup>99</sup> Author's correspondence with Assistant Keeper of Art, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, 2007.

association over several decades which produced some of the most outstanding buildings of the period.

The three dynasties emerged from the Burford quarries with common training, high standards of craftsmanship, understanding of stone and the ability to supply it, which Wren recognised and harnessed to great effect. The importance of quarry-owning in the success of stonemasons' dynasties, including the Stronges, was noted by Colvin when he wrote of the Townsends of Oxford that 'it was only the proximity of the Headington quarries that gave Oxford its flourishing school of masons'.<sup>100</sup> This observation applies similarly to the Stronges, Kempsters and Beauchamps and their Burford quarries.

Chapter Three will now go on to examine the pivotal event for the Burford Masons: the Great Fire of London and the opportunities it opened up for them. It will also look at their close relationship with Wren.

---

<sup>100</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 16.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **THE BURFORD MASONS AFTER THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON, 1666-1681**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter looks at the response of the Burford Masons to the opportunities which the rebuilding opened up in London after the Great Fire. In order to examine issues in greater detail, it is restricted to part only of the research period, from the aftermath of the Great Fire in 1666 to the year of Thomas Strong's death in 1681. These fifteen years warrant close investigation as they witnessed profound changes in the organisation of the building trade, and in the Burford Masons' careers.

The chapter comprises three sections. The first deals with the conditions prevailing in the immediate post-Fire period, starting by looking briefly at the impact of the Fire on the City, and the legislative provisions introduced to stimulate its expeditious rebuilding. These events opened up a new market for stone to which the Burford Masons actively responded, prompting examination of the Strong and Kempster stone-selling operations, in particular of the relative quality of their stone, its transportation, and seasonal factors affecting the business. This is followed by an



examination of the differential rates of masons' pay between the City and the provinces, from the Burford Masons' experience.

The central section investigates the early connections between Sir Christopher Wren and the Burford Masons. In order to throw light on how Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster, as provincial masons, came to be awarded major contracts in London for rebuilding City churches and St Paul's Cathedral, Thomas Strong's pre-Fire associations with Wren are traced. This is followed by looking at manifestations of the growing association of Wren with Strong and Kempster in the rebuilding.

The final section looks at how Strong and Kempster responded to the position in which they found themselves after the Great Fire. It investigates the speed of their reaction to the opportunities of post-Fire London, both as purveyors of stone and as masons. An attempt is made to identify buildings they may have been engaged on in London prior to their first known contract, and to assess the value of their work during their first fifteen years in London.

The most extensive exploration of masons' activity in post-Fire London remains the *London Mason*. Whereas Knoop and Jones looked at this important period as part of their larger study of masons in seventeenth-century London, this chapter, building on their general foundations, scrutinises the experience of Strong and Kempster in depth over the first fifteen years after the Great Fire, Ephraim Beauchamp not being

traceable in London until 1683. It explores Strong and Kempster's motives for seeking work in the rebuilding, their competitive advantages, and the degree of their success. This thesis extends Knoop and Jones's study significantly.

Sources for this chapter include the building accounts for St Paul's Cathedral and City churches, together with vestry minutes and churchwardens' accounts, only some of which have survived. Of the seven parishes that embarked on rebuilding their churches prior to 1670, no building accounts are extant. In only two cases have both the churchwarden's accounts and vestry minutes survived, for St Magnus the Martyr, and St Michael Cornhill. In respect of public buildings, accounts lodged at the Guildhall Library and London Metropolitan Archives have also been consulted. However, in almost all these cases, only the mason-contractor is named in the accounts, excluding master masons working with, or substituting for him. The presence of Burford Masons may well be hidden under this veil, and as a result, the location of their employment as jobbing masons or subcontractors has proved difficult to ascertain. Kempster's Daybook and the Strong Memorandums provide unique first-hand evidence of their business during these years.

As the only Burford Masons taking on contracts in London between 1666 and 1681 were Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster, they will usually be referred to in this chapter as simply 'Strong' and 'Kempster'.

## Section One: CIRCUMSTANCES AFTER THE GREAT FIRE

### THE FIRE AND ITS IMPACT

It is likely that the smoke pall created by the Great Fire could be seen even from Burford, some twenty miles west of Oxford, from where the diarist Anthony Wood observed: 'the wind being eastward blew clouds of smoke over Oxon the next day, and chiefly Tuesday, and the sunshine was much darkened. The same night also the moone was darkened by clouds of smoak and looked reddish'.<sup>1</sup> This would have alerted the inhabitants of Burford to a serious conflagration in the east, which they may well have read about soon afterwards in the *London Gazette* in the issues of the 3 and 10 September.<sup>2</sup> The Great Fire, intensified by summer drought and a strong east wind, started on the second of September and went on to engulf over four-fifths of the City, burning eighty-seven parish churches, St Paul's Cathedral, fifty-two livery company halls, and buildings vital to the City's commerce such as the Royal Exchange, the Custom House, and wharves.<sup>3</sup> An estimated 13,200 houses were destroyed according to the City's surveyors.<sup>4</sup> Outside the City to the north and west, a further sixty-three acres of suburbs were also laid waste by the Fire.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, Antiquary, of Oxford, 1632-1695, described by Himself*, ed. by Andrew Clark, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891-1900), II (1892), 85.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. by E.S. de Beer (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 502; Porter, p. 72.

<sup>4</sup> Eric de Maré, *Wren's London* (London: Folio Society, 1975), p. 54.

<sup>5</sup> T.F. Reddaway *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire*, (London: Cape, 1940), p. 127.

The damage caused by the Fire to the nation's economy had serious implications, especially at a time when extra funds were needed to fight the second Dutch war (1665-67). London's share of the nation's taxation had been large, being the capital city and the leading trading centre. Loans had been raised on the security of London's taxation and were serviced on its revenue.<sup>6</sup> The Fire, however, had devastated the City's trade, obliterating the taxes raised on it, and depleted income from the Hearth Tax.<sup>7</sup> The Corporation of London and livery companies lost significant income from property rents, and parish income from that source had virtually vanished.<sup>8</sup> Urgent economic reasons made it imperative to rebuild the City so that it could resume generating income and revenues as quickly as possible.

The workforce to effect this, however, including masons, had been seriously depleted. Already in the 1630s, London-trained craftsmen were migrating to the suburbs to avoid the control and fees of the livery companies, over the years diminishing the numbers of skilled building craftsmen permitted to work within the City.<sup>9</sup> The decline in building activity during the Interregnum had, by 1660, resulted in a shortage of skilled craftsmen in much of the country, a situation doubtless compounded in 1665 by the serious outbreak of bubonic plague causing the death of around ten percent of the City's inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> The City was further depleted of skilled resources in 1666 whilst the Fire was still burning, following a

---

<sup>6</sup> E.L. Hargreaves, *The National Debt* (London: Arnold, 1930), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Reddaway, pp. 41-2; Porter, p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Jeffery, *The City Churches of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Reddaway, p.42; Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: London I: The Cities of London and Westminster*, 3rd edn, rev. by Bridget Cherry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 62-64.

<sup>10</sup> Geoffrey Beard, *Craftsmen and Interior Decoration in England 1660-1820* (Edinburgh: Bartholomew, 1981), p. 6; Porter, pp. 2, 17.

Royal Proclamation providing 'for distressed persons' made homeless by the Fire to practise their trades in any town in the provinces, regardless of that town's restrictions limiting trade to its own freemen.<sup>11</sup> Several London traders set up in Oxford, for instance, although it is not known whether masons were among them.<sup>12</sup> Many of the City's displaced skilled craftsmen did not return. The resulting number of masons left in the City after the Fire was found to be totally inadequate for the magnitude and urgency of the rebuilding.<sup>13</sup>

## LEGISLATION TO FACILITATE REBUILDING

It was not until five months after the Fire, on 8 February 1667, that legislation was passed to redress the situation, granting provincial craftsmen reciprocal rights to work in the City.<sup>14</sup> This 'Act for Rebuilding of the City of London', known as the (First) Rebuilding Act, provided for building craftsmen from outside the City ('foreigners') to enjoy the same liberty to work in the City as freemen until 1674 or until all the rebuilding was completed. Those who worked under these provisions for seven years were to be granted their freedom in perpetuity. This was a serious blow to the livery companies which had already lost considerable control over their craft. The implications for the London Masons' Company are explored in Chapter Six. The livery companies, however, still retained political influence, electing and supplying the major office holders in the City's government. In view of their

---

<sup>11</sup> Reddaway, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> *Wood*, II, 86.

<sup>13</sup> Porter, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> 18 and 19 Charles II, c.8, of 8 February 1666/7.

standing, the provisions of the Act were bold, removing much of the companies' remaining privileges and sources of income from fees. Such radical action reflected the pressing need to attract building craftsmen.

The same Act, following up a Royal Proclamation delivered soon after the Great Fire on 13 September, prescribed the detailed nature of the rebuilding, in particular requiring external walls of houses to be rebuilt in brick or stone. Previous Proclamations and an Act of Parliament made earlier in the century providing for new buildings to be constructed of brick or stone had achieved only limited success, as the proportion of new stock was small, and the regulations were openly contravened.<sup>15</sup> The scale of the rebuilding made necessary by the Fire, however, led to this requirement being finally accepted by the citizens, and enforceable.<sup>16</sup> Even houses rebuilt of brick often required stone finishes, opening up opportunities for stonemasons' skills.

In order to attract Londoners back to the City, and for economic activity to be resumed as soon as possible, the 1667 Act also placed some urgency on the rebuilding of dwellings, providing for the Lord Mayor to serve notice and sell sites where houses were not rebuilt within three years.<sup>17</sup> This compressed timescale intensified the need for skilled building craftsmen.

---

<sup>15</sup> Philip Booth, 'Speculative Housing and the Land Market in London 1660-1730', *Town Planning Review*, 51:4 (1980), 379-398 (p. 382).

<sup>16</sup> James Ayres, *Building the Georgian City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Michael Cooper, *A More Beautiful City* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), p. 130.

Of the eighty-seven parish churches burnt by the Fire, the 1667 Act stipulated that thirty-nine should be rebuilt, a figure that was raised to fifty-one in 1670 by the Additional, or Second Rebuilding Act.<sup>18</sup> There was a strong likelihood that at least some of those churches, and other public or prestige buildings such as livery halls, would be built of stone, requiring not only masons' skills, but stone in large quantities. London had no stone quarries, so all stone, unless re-used from the Fire debris, would need to be brought in.

## **THE STRONG AND KEMPSTER STONE OPERATIONS**

Strong and Kempster would have found themselves in a favourable position, since they owned a vital asset: quarries producing quality stone for use as structural building material, finishes, and for sculpture. A closer examination of their stone selling operation provides a valuable opportunity to explore their ingenuity as entrepreneurs.

The gentleman architect Sir Roger Pratt, advising on the process of building in 1665, strongly recommended buying stone from the 'first owners of it', meaning quarry-owners such as the Strongs or the Kempsters.<sup>19</sup> Where this was not possible, Pratt understood that choosing quality stone was 'by no means easy' for the client. Mason-contractors were expected to source the stone for their commissions, although few in London possessed their own quarries, procuring stone instead from quarry-owners. The Memorandums

---

<sup>18</sup> 22 Charles II, c.11, of 11 April 1670.

<sup>19</sup> *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, ed. by R.T. Gunther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 84.

record Strong selling 'great Quantitys [of stone] to other Masons' in London after the Fire; Kempster's Daybook is more specific, noting 'received of mr Knight for | the first parsell of stone | delivered at London £15-0-0', identifying 'mr marshall' and 'mr cartwright' as further clients (Figure 33).<sup>20</sup> These names presumably refer to Thomas Knight, the City Mason, Joshua Marshall, who went on to succeed his father as the Crown's Master Mason, and Thomas Cartwright, the London mason-contractor. Strong and Kempster, as 'first owners' of stone, should have had a clear advantage in competing for contracts in London, yet my scrutiny of contracts for the first twenty City churches shows that, despite Pratt's advice, all were let to London masons instead, except where records are lost (Figure 34). It is possible that Strong and Kempster did not put themselves forward for these early contracts, perhaps due to the financial risks involved, or because they were already fully committed. It is more likely, however, that London masons were given preference at that time, as was the case with municipal contracts, all of which were awarded to London masons, such as the rebuilding of Newgate Gaol, built by Thomas Knight, and the Monument, by Joshua Marshall.<sup>21</sup>

The Strong's' quarries at Taynton and Little Barrington had been worked over many centuries, Taynton since at least Roman times, a Roman sarcophagus of Taynton stone having been found near Taynton mill in 1814.<sup>22</sup> Quarries at Taynton were recorded in the Domesday Book, indicating that they were of commercial value in the late eleventh

---

<sup>20</sup> SM, Letter-book; BT, Daybook, fol. B3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> *London Mason*, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> Joanna Turner, *Quarries and Craftsmen of the Windrush Valley* (Burford: Cottage Print, 1988), p. 3. The sarcophagus was moved to Burford Parish Churchyard.



century.<sup>23</sup> Figure 35 shows a plan of the quarries at Taynton. Stone from Taynton is of a soft ochre hue due to its iron oxide content, which generally weathers well, Dr Robert Plot observing 'it endures the Weather'.<sup>24</sup> Barrington stone is of a brownish colour, also of good quality.<sup>25</sup> The stone from the Kempster quarry at Upton is pale and finer in texture, giving a good cutting edge, 'much a finer *Arris* [sharp edge]', according to Plot.<sup>26</sup> Being slightly more susceptible to weathering, it is best suited to interior finishings and sculpture. The difference in colour between stone from the Upton and Taynton quarries can be seen in Figure 36. Despite their diversity, stone from the Burford, Taynton and Barrington quarries not only belongs to the same Great Oolite geological group, but is classified together within the Taynton Limestone Formation.<sup>27</sup> Confusingly, the generic term 'Burford stone' was often used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to describe stone from the Upton, Taynton, and Barrington quarries without distinction, obscuring the identity of the quarry of origin.<sup>28</sup>

The Burford quarries, however, were not alone in producing quality stone. An even more finely-textured and frost-resistant stone was produced by a few quarries in north Northamptonshire around Stamford, for instance Ketton, Ancaster and Clipsham.<sup>29</sup> The stone of choice for facing prestige buildings in London was to become that from the Crown's own quarries on the Isle of Portland, yielding a white, durable limestone. It had

---

<sup>23</sup> *Domesday Book 14 Oxfordshire*, ed. by John Morris (Chichester: Phillimore, 1978), p. 157a.

<sup>24</sup> Plot, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> W.J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947; repr. Wakefield: S.R. Publishers, 1970), p. 77.

<sup>26</sup> Philip Powell, *The Geology of Oxfordshire* (Stanbridge: Dovecote, 2005), p. 28; Plot, p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Powell, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> Arkell, p. 67.

<sup>29</sup> Alec Clifton-Taylor and A.S. Ireson, *English Stone Building* (London: Gollancz, 1983), p. 19.

been utilised before the Great Fire for building the Banqueting House for instance, and afterwards for the Monument, and livery halls not built of brick. Portland stone resisted the coal-smoke of London better than that from Taynton. This may have been realised only later, however, for the Taynton stone which was used externally at St Paul's had to be replaced by Portland only fifty years later.<sup>30</sup> The swift effect of London's smoke-polluted atmosphere on the stone at St Paul's was noted by the German traveller Zacharias Conrad, who observed of St Paul's as early as 1710, 'It is already so black with coal-smoke that it has lost half its elegance'.<sup>31</sup>

A royal warrant of 1676 gave the commissioners rebuilding St Paul's the free use of stone from the king's quarries on Portland.<sup>32</sup> This, in principle, should have seriously disadvantaged any other quarry-owners seeking to sell their stone for St Paul's. However, the free Portland stone was not without significant costs and problems of extraction and transport. Although the Portland quarries were well placed for shipping by sea, in order to reach its destination at Baynard's Castle in the City, the stone had to be unloaded on the Thames at Redriffe Stairs (Rotherhithe) and craned on to smaller vessels which could navigate the low and narrow arches of London Bridge.<sup>33</sup> The process of transferring stone to different vessels was costly, entailing risk of damage. Deliveries could also be disrupted by adverse weather conditions at sea, particularly in winter, with stone being damaged in transit. The third Dutch war (1672-74) made sea transport more vulnerable

---

<sup>30</sup> James W.P. Campbell, *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald Cobb, *The Old Churches of London* (London: Batsford, 1942), p. 80.

<sup>32</sup> J.H. Bethey, 'The Supply of Stone for Re-Building St Paul's Cathedral', *Archaeological Journal*, 128 (1971), 176-185, p. 177.

<sup>33</sup> Campbell, pp. 89-90, 96.

and unreliable, a factor arising again fifteen years later when war with the French broke out.<sup>34</sup> At the quarries themselves, landslips and disputes with the islanders were not uncommon, causing interruption to the supply of stone; already in 1678, Strong was among those dispatched to report on the problems on the island, to enable deliveries to resume.<sup>35</sup>

### **Transportation of stone to London**

For the enterprising quarry-owner who could be relied upon to deliver quality stone at a reasonable price, a wide market had opened up in London. The cost of transporting stone from quarry to client was a significant factor in competing successfully. The haulage of stone overland was appreciably more expensive than by river. Moving stone overland from Oxford to London, for instance, cost three pounds a ton, triple that for water carriage, some overland routes even costing up to five times that of water transport.<sup>36</sup> It is noteworthy that a sloping weir was constructed on the River Windrush in the late seventeenth century just downstream of the Strongs' quarry at Little Barrington to enable stone-laden barges to shoot the weir and reach Burford by water instead of overland.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1750s, the architectural writer Isaac Ware emphasised the importance of close access to a navigable waterway when choosing a site for building, in order to reduce

---

<sup>34</sup> Bettey, p. 181.

<sup>35</sup> WS, XIII (1936), 107.

<sup>36</sup> D.G. Wilson, *The Making of the Middle Thames* (Bourne End: Spurbooks, 1977), p. 103; Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880* (London: Hambledon, 2000), p. 179.

<sup>37</sup> Sybil Longhurst, Walter Tufnell, and Alice Tufnell, *Sherborne: A Cotswold Village* (Stroud: Sutton, 1992), p. 9.

costs.<sup>38</sup> This observation was equally valid from the quarry-owner's point of view. The proximity of the Strong and Kempster quarries to the River Thames at Radcot, just eight miles south of Burford, made the cost of their stone in London competitive with suppliers who had to cart their stone over long distances, or transfer their loads from sea-going ships to smaller barges. Once stone from the Burford quarries had been dragged the short distance to the top of White Hill (identified as Cotswold Gate on Figure 3), the remaining journey to Radcot was downhill. By comparison, the Northamptonshire quarries, although a similar distance from London, were less favourably placed for water transport, involving shipping by sea, with its inherent problems.

The infrastructure for transporting stone from the Burford quarries down the Thames to Oxford, Windsor, or London had been established over the centuries and was still operational. As recently as August 1666, Strong was shipping Taynton stone from Radcot to Oxford for the Sheldonian Theatre.<sup>39</sup> Even Radcot Bridge was built of Taynton stone.<sup>40</sup> With such ready organisation, the Burford Masons would have been advantageously positioned to respond speedily to orders. Stone from the Burford quarries destined for London was loaded onto boats at Radcot (Figure 37), and transferred to river barges at Oxford for the remaining journey to wharves just south of St Paul's Cathedral, particularly Paul's Wharf, Broken Wharf, Baynard's Castle, Bull Wharf, Puddle Dock,

---

<sup>38</sup> Wilson and Mackley, pp. 178-79.

<sup>39</sup> Bodl., MS Bodl. 898, Sheldonian Acquittance Book.

<sup>40</sup> Powell, p. 32.

and Brookes Wharf, and from the later 1670s, to those along the Fleet Channel (Figure 38).<sup>41</sup>

Kempster's Daybook has been found to be a valuable source of evidence about his shipping of stone. It notes payments in 1669 to the Oxford boatmaster Richard Pemerton, for 'the hole cariag by Richard pemertun from ratcat to oxford of S and K 242 tunn 12 <sup>1/2</sup> foot'.<sup>42</sup> The letters 'S and K' are not mentioned elsewhere in the daybook, but likely refer to Strong and Kempster, Kempster being in charge of the shipping in that instance. The Daybook records payments to other Oxford boatmasters such as Humphrey Duffin, William Howse (who leased land at Castle Mill Stream) and Walter Chapman (boatmaster at Folly Bridge) for shipping stone from Radcot in the early 1670s.<sup>43</sup>

The commercial advantage of the proximity of the Strong and Kempster quarries to the Thames emerges clearly in the Wren Society's analysis of the total value of stone used for rebuilding St Paul's Cathedral.<sup>44</sup> Disregarding stone from Portland, nine quarries are listed, of which payments for Burford stone are the highest, totalling around £21,475. The next highest payment amounted to little more than half that sum, around £11,860, for stone from the Headington quarries at Oxford, also well placed for transport along the Thames. The sums quoted include the cost of transport, which in the case of Burford stone is likely to have been the higher of the two, being further upstream and needing

---

<sup>41</sup> GL, MS. 25,473; Mary Prior, *Fisher Row, Fishermen, Bargemen and Boatmen in Oxford 1500-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 130.

<sup>42</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. B6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> BT, Daybook; Prior pp. 125-138.

<sup>44</sup> WS, xv (1938), xvi.

change of craft, but even accounting for this, Burford stands out significantly as the major supplier.

### **Seasonal factors affecting deliveries of stone**

Despite the established infrastructure, the smooth delivery of stone by river from Burford to London could still be thwarted by adverse seasonal conditions, exacerbated by millers who controlled the flash-locks, extracting water from the Thames for their own purposes.<sup>45</sup> Drought could quickly make the Thames south of Oxford too shallow for navigation, Plot noting in 1677 that 'in dry times, Barges do sometimes lie aground [in the Thames] three Weeks, or a Month, or more, as we have had Experience in past summers'.<sup>46</sup> Kempster intermittently recorded carting his stone to 'Colum' (Culham, eleven miles downstream of Oxford), one of his entries indicating summer 1668, presumably when the water level was too low to use the established route from Radcot.<sup>47</sup> Culham being about three times the distance overland as Radcot, this must have seriously affected profit. Presumably the sheer quantity of stone sold in London, and the higher price it fetched there, more than made up for such additional outgoings. Wood observed that after a notably dry February and March in 1685, 'boatmen can not goe from Oxon to London but take boats at Bircot', Bircot lying some fifteen miles downstream from Oxford (Figure 2).<sup>48</sup> This was probably an exception, however; J.M.W. Halley, after inspecting the building accounts for St Paul's, observed that the supply of Burford stone

---

<sup>45</sup> Prior, p. 133.

<sup>46</sup> Plot, p. 239.

<sup>47</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. F7<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Wood, III, 136.

was generally reliable over the winter months, by contrast to deliveries from Portland.<sup>49</sup> Boatmen would charge extra for their trouble navigating in difficult conditions, as John Lufton, Fellow of St John's College, Oxford, recorded in his building accounts in September 1634 whilst the Strongs were working on Canterbury Quad: 'the Waters being exceeding Lowe I was faine to raise the price'.<sup>50</sup>

Seasonality also affected the state of roads, especially in winter. Malcolm Airs noted that during the construction of Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, less than half the average summer loads could be carted in winter.<sup>51</sup> More seriously, inclement weather could make roads impassable at any time other than summer, as was the case carting supplies from Bristol for building Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire.<sup>52</sup> Even the eight miles from Burford to Radcot might have been impassable in bad weather, the limestone surface puddling.

Labour for handling stone from the Burford quarries was also subject to seasonal pressures, for example when men were needed for sowing or harvesting work. The Kempsters particularly would have been mindful of this, being farmers as well as quarry-owners and masons, having to manage their labour force to best advantage. Men on the Kempster payroll appear to have been versatile however, able to carry out quarrying, carting, agricultural work and even masonry. Kempster would have been in a position to organise his men according to his own priorities, such flexibility giving him another

---

<sup>49</sup> 'The Rebuilding and the Workmen of St Paul's Cathedral for the "Accounts"', *RIBA Journal*, 22.3 (1914), 49-60 (p. 56).

<sup>50</sup> SJCA, MUN LXXXI.2, fol. 28.

<sup>51</sup> *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), p. 136.

<sup>52</sup> Wilson and Mackley, p. 179.

advantage over London competitors. Those employing men in the provinces solely as building labourers had to pay higher rates at times of agricultural demand in order to tempt them from the fields, as was noted in the Canterbury Quad building accounts in 1634, 'Harvest time...For extraordinary charge in getting Laborers at that time...xxv<sup>st</sup>'.<sup>53</sup> The Stronges, running a large and long-established quarrying and masonry operation at Taynton, were likely to retain their men throughout the year and be less affected by seasonal agricultural demands on labour. Horses and carts needed for carrying stone were also taken over for agricultural purposes at these critical times, forcing the price up, as experienced a few decades later at Blenheim Palace when farmers charged more for transporting stone at harvest time.<sup>54</sup> Kempster's Daybook mirrors this agricultural seasonality, showing deft management of his workforce. It illustrates the competitive advantage of operating an agricultural enterprise together with a quarry.

## **DIFFERENTIAL RATES OF PAY**

To provincial masons, a major attraction of working in London would have been the higher rates of pay. My endeavours to compare, by reference to Strong and Kempster's work, daily rates of pay in London with those in the provinces have produced few, but very revealing figures over the period under investigation up to 1681. In London, payment for contract work was generally based on measurement of particular stages of construction, although work additional to contract, identified as 'taskwork', was paid on daily rates. Occasionally, their work for parish vestries also shows up daily rates. It is

---

<sup>53</sup> SJCA, MUN LXXXI.2, fol. 27.

<sup>54</sup> Wilson and Mackley, p. 181; David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (London: Country Life, 1951), p. 73.



perhaps indicative of the sparse evidence for daily rates in London that Knoop and Jones, in comparing rates in Oxford, Cambridge and London, drew on the London Bridge building accounts only, and used estimates in respect of Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>55</sup>

There are few known examples of Strong and Kempster working outside London at this time. The building accounts for Strong's commission in 1675 at Hamstead Marshall, Berkshire, have not been located, and those for Kempster on County Hall, Abingdon 1677-81, also then Berkshire, record intermittent payments which cannot be analysed on a daily basis.<sup>56</sup> However, Kempster's work at Tom Tower, Christ Church, Oxford, was paid weekly, the building accounts providing first-hand evidence of daily rates in Oxford in 1681.<sup>57</sup> Regarding rural areas outside Oxford, Kempster's Daybook reveals daily rates of pay to his master masons in 1680.<sup>58</sup> An examination of the Churchwardens' Accounts for St John Baptist Church, Burford, has shown up rates per day for jobbing masons in the 1660s.<sup>59</sup>

Analysis of this evidence has shown a significant differential in masons' rates of pay between London and Oxfordshire even before the rebuilding of London (Figure 39A). According to the Sheldonian Theatre Acquittance Book, master masons in Oxford were paid one shilling and sixpence per day in 1666.<sup>60</sup> In Burford, jobbing masons John and Thomas Osmond were paid eleven percent less, one shilling and fourpence per day, for

---

<sup>55</sup> *London Mason*, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts.

<sup>57</sup> CCM, Bills 1679-81 and 1683-92.

<sup>58</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. F12<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> ORO, MSS D.D Par/Burford c.36.

<sup>60</sup> MS Bodl. 898.

their work on Burford Church in 1661 and 1668 respectively.<sup>61</sup> By comparison, master masons at this time at London Bridge were paid two shillings and sixpence a day.<sup>62</sup>

The Fire severely disrupted the supply and demand relationship in the City's building trade and there was concern about the danger of profiteering from the new situation. To address this, a Fire Court was set up in 1667 and given authority to determine wage rates in the building trades.<sup>63</sup> Strikes were declared illegal, anyone withholding labour could be imprisoned for one month or heavily fined.<sup>64</sup> However, wages for the building trade in the City appear to have adjusted themselves satisfactorily by normal economic forces without interference by the Fire Court, which was finally disbanded in 1676.<sup>65</sup>

A comparison of rates of pay some fifteen years after the Fire can similarly be made by reference to Strong and Kempster (Figure 39B). Kempster's Daybook notes payments in 1680 to his master masons John Seacole and Walter Sessions at one shilling and sixpence per day for erecting the gate piers for Sir John Lenthall in Burford.<sup>66</sup> A year later, when Kempster started work on Tom Tower, he and other master masons were also paid one shilling and sixpence per day, rising to one and eightpence after the first month and thereafter. This eleven percent increase may well reflect work at height on the tower, involving risks and difficulties for which masons usually demanded a premium. When

---

<sup>61</sup> ORO, MSS D.D Par/Burford c.36.

<sup>62</sup> *London Mason*, p. 63.

<sup>63</sup> 18 and 19 Charles II, c.7.

<sup>64</sup> de Maré, *Wren's London*, p. 84.

<sup>65</sup> Adrian Tinniswood, *By Permission of Heaven* (London: Pimlico, 2004), p. 241.

<sup>66</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. F12<sup>r</sup>.

Christ Church's Treasurer W.G. Hiscock made a brief resumé of these accounts in *A Christ Church Miscellany*, this increase was not noticed.<sup>67</sup>

In 1681 Kempster and Strong were still working on St Stephen Walbrook. On the occasions when payments per day are noted in the building accounts, the rate was two shillings and sixpence, half as much again as Kempster's top rate in Oxford.<sup>68</sup> Strong had similarly charged St Stephen Walbrook Vestry two shillings and sixpence per day in 1678, the rate at which masons at London Bridge were being paid.<sup>69</sup> As Kempster's London work was highly remunerative, it is not clear why he should have taken on the Christ Church commission at such comparatively low rates of pay. Kempster may have accepted this work as a favour to Wren, either in gratitude for, or expectation of further work in London or the provinces. The building accounts show Christ Church to have been reliable payers, on a weekly basis, which would have helped offset the dilatory payments from the Rebuilding Commission for his London contracts. This is an example of a Burford Mason balancing contracts in order to stay afloat. The issue of late payments is explored in Chapter Five.

The evidence shows that, when the bonus for working at height is disregarded, rates of pay in London and Oxford were no higher in 1680-1 than before the Great Fire. Burford, by contrast, shows an increase of 12<sup>1/2</sup>%. This rise suggests a local shortage of masons in 1680-1, their numbers depleted by those going to London.

---

<sup>67</sup> *A Christ Church Miscellany* (Oxford: OUP, 1946), pp. 232-234.

<sup>68</sup> GL, MS 25,539/1; CCM, Bills 1679-81, fol. 129.

<sup>69</sup> GL, MS 594/2; *London Mason*, p. 63.

Taking on contracts in London not only resulted in higher personal remuneration for Strong and Kempster, but in higher wages for the workforce. The implications of this aspect have been difficult to assess, however, as evidence is lacking on such factors as numbers employed, wages, and the profit involved. However, the Memorandums state that Strong took his own workforce with him to London, as Kempster possibly did, so they probably did not pay out full London wages at first.<sup>70</sup>

To aspirational provincial masons, higher London rates offered a sudden and significant rise in income, a bonus which would help capitalise their business and buffer them against dilatory payments once they took on contracts. London masons, who were used to such rates and had geared up their businesses accordingly, would not have this advantage. To the provincial mason also able to sell his stone on projects he was engaged upon, like Strong and Kempster, these higher rates constituted a double gain.

## **Section Two: THE WREN CONNECTION**

Strong and Kempster had an additional reason to try their hand in London: Thomas Strong's earlier connection with Christopher Wren. Personal contacts could make a critical difference to a craftsman's career when seeking to break into an unfamiliar and

---

<sup>70</sup> SM, Letter-book.

highly competitive market. It is unlikely that such a responsible task as rebuilding St Stephen Walbrook, perhaps the most prestigious and technically complex of all the City churches, would have been awarded to unknown and untried masons. This chapter now seeks to trace when and where the Burford Masons' paths crossed with Wren before their London days, the beginnings of what was to develop into a long and extraordinary working relationship.

Wren was central to the rebuilding from the start. Within less than a month of the Fire, he was one of the king's three appointees along with Hugh May and Pratt to a joint commission with the three City representatives Robert Hooke, the bricklayer Peter Mills, and carpenter Edward Jerman, reporting to the Privy Council on the rebuilding.<sup>71</sup> It is notable that master craftsmen were appointed to this commission alongside gentlemen such as Wren and Hooke. Wren rose rapidly in influence to become Surveyor-General of the King's Works in 1669, and was in a position to award commissions for rebuilding City churches and St Paul's Cathedral.

Until 1662 Strong 'had been for some time doing Business in the way of his trade for Sir James Thynne' at Longleat, Wiltshire.<sup>72</sup> Wren is also known to have been engaged by Thynne in the early 1660s, for whom he designed the main staircase and doorway.<sup>73</sup> This may well have been work which Strong himself was engaged

---

<sup>71</sup> Porter, p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>73</sup> Colvin, p. 995; W. Michael, *Historical Associations of Longleat House* (London: Michael, 1867).

upon, in which case, their paths crossed at Longleat at this time. This seems to be the first indication of Wren knowing the Strong's, and possibly working with them.

In 1665 Strong embarked on the masonry for the north building of Garden Quad, Trinity College, Oxford, which Wren had designed before he left for Paris in July that year.<sup>74</sup> Strong's involvement in the project may have resulted from Wren having knowledge of him at Longleat. The commission may, however, equally have come through Strong's partner at Garden Quad, the Burford carpenter Thomas Minchin, who, as inspection of the building accounts has shown, was engaged across the road at Wren's Sheldonian Theatre (1664-8).<sup>75</sup> Its building accounts do not reveal Strong himself to have been employed at the Sheldonian, although he was certainly a supplier of stone for its construction for over three years.<sup>76</sup> As a carpenter, Minchin needed a master mason at Garden Quad, and as a Burford man himself would have known Strong. However, only Minchin is mentioned as a contact in Wren's correspondence with the College President Dr Ralph Bathurst, presumably because Minchin was working nearby.<sup>77</sup> As Wren was Professor of Astronomy at Oxford at the time, he would have had opportunity to inspect the building on his return, and would certainly have been informed of Strong and Minchin's progress through his friend Bathurst.

---

<sup>74</sup> TCA, Misc. vol. I, fol. 126.

<sup>75</sup> MS Bodl. 898.

<sup>76</sup> MS Bodl. 898.

<sup>77</sup> TCA, Misc. vol. I, 82/126, fol. 126.

Wren is also likely to have been aware of Strong's commissions at Cornbury Park, Oxfordshire, in 1663 on the stables, and from spring 1666 on the east, or Clarendon, front.<sup>78</sup> Matthew Wren, Christopher's Wren's cousin, was secretary to Strong's client Lord Clarendon until 1667, when he was appointed to the Duke of York's household.<sup>79</sup> Lisa Jardine points out that Matthew was one of Wren's closest friends and a member of the Royal Society, where they would have met frequently.<sup>80</sup>

Strong's early connection with Wren would go some way to account for him, along with his partner Kempster, being entrusted with St Stephen Walbrook. This important commission was to prove the Burford Masons' entry into the select group of master masons Wren repeatedly turned to for many of the foremost building projects of the time. This cooperation was to bear fruit in Burford Masons being awarded no less than thirty-three contracts for City churches (1672-1717), shown diagrammatically in Figure 40, and further contracts for Tom Tower (1681-4), Winchester Palace (1683-5), and for St Paul's over almost its entire building period (1675-1718). The unusual longevity, both professional and personal, of Wren, Kempster and later Edward Strong senior in an age when life expectancy was around half of what they achieved, allowed their fertile professional relationship to continue for many decades.

---

<sup>78</sup> SM, Letter-book; John Newman, 'Hugh May, Clarendon and Cornbury' in *English Architecture Public and Private*, ed by J. Bold and E. Chaney (London: Hambledon, 1993) pp. 81-88 (p. 82).

<sup>79</sup> Lisa Jardine, *On a Grand Scale: The Outstanding Career of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 72.

<sup>80</sup> Jardine, pp. 9, 154.

Already in the 1670s, Strong and Kempster were invited to socialise with Wren at 'perambulation dinners', which parish vestries organised at various hostelryes on Ascension Day after the annual ceremony of beating the bounds. The Vestry of St Stephen Walbrook held these dinners at the Fountain and Bull Head Taverns, attended by Wren and the principal craftsmen involved in rebuilding the church until 1681.<sup>81</sup>

By 1681, Kempster's personal connection with and appreciation by Wren emerges strongly in the latter's correspondence with Bishop Fell of Oxford, in commending Kempster as mason-contractor for Tom Tower above Oxford masons, part of which was quoted in the previous Chapter (Figure 25). Such was Wren's determination to have Kempster carry out his designs for Tom Tower that he spent time riding out to Burford to persuade Kempster to return via Oxford and wait upon Fell. Wren was therefore well acquainted by this time with Kempster's character, the quality of his workmanship, and his quarry.

### **Section Three: RESPONSE OF STRONG AND KEMPSTER TO THE POST-FIRE SITUATION**

This section will go on to examine how swiftly Strong and Kempster responded to the post-Fire situation, looking first at their role as purveyors of stone, then their work as masons.

---

<sup>81</sup> GL, MS 594/2; Cobb, p. 51.



## RESPONSE AS PURVEYORS OF STONE

The Fire had occurred in early September, towards the end of the building season. Among the provisions of the Royal Proclamation later that month was a prohibition on rebuilding work until clear guidelines could be issued, and streets and individual plots surveyed.<sup>82</sup> The ensuing winter, so cold that the Thames froze over, ensured that these provisions were generally complied with, for practical reasons.<sup>83</sup> As seen earlier in the chapter, the new legislative and organisational framework was in place by the beginning of the new building season, spring 1667, to enable construction to begin.

There were, however, intrinsic delays in the provision of building materials, particularly when required on a large scale. Clay for bricks had to be dug in the autumn and weathered over winter, and only from April onwards through the summer months could it be fired into bricks.<sup>84</sup> Limestone, such as that from Burford or Portland, contains quarry sap when first extracted, a natural fluid rich in dissolved minerals which must be allowed to dry out before use as a construction material, a process in some cases taking at least six months.<sup>85</sup> Some limestones, such as Bath stone, need underground storage over winter to avoid frost damage,

---

<sup>82</sup> Tinniswood, p. 192.

<sup>83</sup> de Maré, p. 52.

<sup>84</sup> Hermione Hobhouse and Ann Saunders, *Good and Proper Materials* (London: RCHME, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>85</sup> Peter Stanier, *Quarries and Quarrying* (Princes Risborough: Shire, 2000), p. 13.

only to be brought to the surface between May and November for seasoning.<sup>86</sup>

Stone from the Strong and Kempster quarries, however, best quarried between April and October, had the advantage of drying fast in frosty weather and so could be made available for building purposes up to six months earlier than that of competitors.<sup>87</sup>

The earliest these materials might have been available for use after the Fire would have been in spring 1667, along with the new legal provisions enabling rebuilding to begin. In anticipation of this, already on 22 December 1666 the *London Gazette* invited all persons 'willing to serve and furnish this City' with particular building materials, including stone, to present themselves with their written proposals for contracting for work to the Committee of Common Council at Gresham House, where the civic authorities were temporarily based (Figure 41).<sup>88</sup> It is not known, however, whether Strong or Kempster responded to this particular announcement.

Looking at the question as to when Strong and Kempster started delivering stone for the rebuilding, the Strong Memorandums provide an indication:

In the Year 1667 Artificers were invited by Act of Parliament to Rebuild  
the City of London and accordingly the afores'd Thomas Strong provided

---

<sup>86</sup> Paul Jenkins, *Geology and the Buildings of Oxford* (Oxford: Thematic Trails, 1988), p. 37; Arkell, p. 75.

<sup>87</sup> Freda Derrick, *Cotswold Stone* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1948), p. 27.

<sup>88</sup> *London Gazette*, 20-24 December 1666; Tinniswood, p. 235; de Maré, p. 54.

stone at the Quarryys which he had the command of, & sent the same to London, & sold great Quantitys to other Masons.<sup>89</sup>

This places Strong's initial response to sometime after the Rebuilding Act of February 1667. The use of the word 'accordingly' suggests that Strong's response was expeditious, 'great Quantitys' reflecting his success.

The entry noted above for Kempster's 'first parsell of stone' is undated, but that immediately following on the same page is dated the 3 August, a payday (Figure 33). The Daybook indicates that Saturday was Kempster's usual payday. The 3 August fell on a Saturday in 1667. A page later, Christmas is mentioned, followed by Easter and Whitsuntide, which can be established as 1668 from the date Whitsuntide falls.<sup>90</sup> Although entries in the Daybook are not reliably consecutive, these, closely following on in the same hand, indicate very strongly that Kempster's 'first parsell of stone' was delivered before August 1667. In order to have obtained these orders, Kempster must have been in London some time before then. I have been unable to tie up Knight, Marshall or Cartwright taking this particular delivery, but building accounts do show Joshua Marshall being active on repairs at old St Paul's Cathedral around this time, buying in 'Burford stone'.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> SM, Letter-book

<sup>90</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. B4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> GL, MS 25,471/16, fol. 83. Marshall went on to buy 'Burford Stone' for Whitehall Palace and Hampton Court Palace in November 1688: TNA, WORK 5/145.

I have detailed my methods of calculation to establish the critical date of Kempster's first payment for stone in London. This does not tally with W. Douglas Carøe, who unequivocally claims the year to have been 1668, without providing evidence.<sup>92</sup> My calculations, however, establish that within less than a year of the Fire, Kempster was already supplying stone for the rebuilding.

Another early, but also undated, entry in the Daybook shows Kempster paying his man Lawrence Chadwell for thirteen days' work in Burford, while Kempster was 'at London' (Figure 42).<sup>93</sup> This entry is likely to have been made around December 1667, calculated by reference to the entries immediately following, dated January, and another stating 'after ester fowler rought | to the 11 of aprill 13 days'. Easter fell early in 1668 on 22 March, allowing another of Kempster's men, Thomas Fowler, to fit in his thirteen days' work before the 11th April. This would not have been possible in 1667, 1669, or 1670, when Easter fell later. By 1668 and 1669, Kempster was carting large quantities of stone to Radcot or Culham, employing at least forty-five hauliers in addition to the men he employed for agricultural and masonry work, which for a town of less than a thousand inhabitants would have been a significant undertaking.

In order for Strong and Kempster to be in a position to sell large quantities of stone ready for use in spring or summer 1667, however, they must have been quarrying it already shortly after the Fire. This prescience is an illustration of their business acumen and readiness to grasp opportunities. With their large-scale stone-selling

---

<sup>92</sup> Carøe, p. 90.

<sup>93</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. F5<sup>v</sup>.

operations to London they capitalised their firms, enabling them later to take on and withstand late-paying contracts, an issue explored in Chapter Five.

## RESPONSE AS MASONS

Strong and Kempster were among the many provincial masons to benefit from the provisions of the 1667 Act granting them rights to carry out their masonry craft in London. The Memorandums go on to record that Strong

took up Masons with him to London, to work for him to serve the City in what they wanted in his way of Trade, & continued there in that Employment for many years till most of the Houses and Halls were built.<sup>94</sup>

Like the sale of his stone, this dates Strong's response to sometime after the Act was passed in February 1667 with an intimation of expeditious action, and records his success in finding building work in London over a substantial period of time.

In 1667, Strong was already committed to two important commissions in Oxfordshire, at Cornbury Park and Trinity College. Work on the east wing at Cornbury had started in the spring of 1666, the Memorandums noting that Strong had not finished it at the time of the Fire.<sup>95</sup> An account dated March 1668, eighteen months later, 'To Thomas Strong for a casement for a patterne for Cornbury...£30

---

<sup>94</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>95</sup> Newman, p. 82; SM, Letter-book.

12s', indicates he was still supplying some services at Cornbury in spring 1668.<sup>96</sup> However, a letter from Lord Clarendon's London steward John Clotterbook to his Cornbury steward, John Carey, in August 1667 discusses wainscoting, which implies that most of the masonry work was by then completed.<sup>97</sup> In respect of Trinity College, the building accounts for Garden Quad show Strong's main activity to have been in 1665 and 1666, and, although a final payment was made on 8 July 1667, Strong and Minchin were tiling the roof already in the previous December.<sup>98</sup> Both buildings nearing completion by spring 1667, Strong's engagement on them was significantly lessened, freeing him to sell his stone in London and relocate his labour resources there.

Kempster's presence in London in these early post-Fire years is detected only twice in his Daybook, the thirteen days around December 1667 mentioned above, and fifteen days some time between July and December 1668.<sup>99</sup> These entries were only made to record payments to Chadwell for work in Kempster's absence, and are unlikely to represent all of Kempster's stays in London. As these absences appear lengthy periods for the purpose of selling stone only, it is likely that Kempster also undertook masonry work during these times.

Kempster was also likely to have been attracted to work in London by legislation in 1670, which appears to have been another trigger for acting expeditiously. The

---

<sup>96</sup> TNA, PRO C 104/109, summary account records.

<sup>97</sup> Newman, p. 87.

<sup>98</sup> TCA, III E/1, fol. 14.

<sup>99</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. F4<sup>v</sup>.

Second Rebuilding Act passed in April 1670 had considerably increased the number of churches to be rebuilt, and allocated public funds for their reconstruction by raising the tax on coal coming into the port of London. This was likely to result in many rebuilding contracts becoming available for stonemasons. Strong and Kempster did not delay in placing themselves on a level footing with their London competitors by becoming members of the London Masons' Company, Kempster only four months later on the fourth of August, Strong shortly afterwards on the fifteenth of September.<sup>100</sup> Chapter Six explores their likely reasons further, but the relevance here is the speed with which they positioned themselves favourably for early consideration in winning valuable business. The rapid response of both Strong and Kempster in recognising the opportunities presented after the Great Fire is again evidence of their astuteness and flexibility as businessmen.

It is clear that between 1667 and their first known London contract in 1672, Strong was carrying out masonry work in the capital, and very likely Kempster as well. Despite the evidence in the Daybook and Memorandums, neither specifies which buildings they were engaged upon in this period. These are their obscure years in London which this chapter now turns to investigate, examining which projects they may have worked on.

Neither Strong's nor Kempster's name has turned up in any of the building accounts, churchwardens' accounts or vestry minutes inspected relating to construction

---

<sup>100</sup> GL, MS 5313, Masons' Company Quarteredge Book.

between 1667 and 1672. Building accounts checked include those for the Guildhall, Customs House, Newgate Gaol, old St Paul's, and churches started under the 1670 Act, as well as surviving churchwardens' accounts and vestry minutes for churches where rebuilding started prior to 1670 which were not yet financed by the Commission.<sup>101</sup> Their names are also absent in the pre-1672 building accounts for livery halls belonging to the Masons', Grocers', Brewers', Weavers', Painter-Stainers' and Merchant Taylors' Companies.<sup>102</sup>

Between 1667 and 1672 stonemasons were needed to rebuild public buildings necessary for trade and revenue, and for the reconstruction of at least seven City churches started in the late 1660s. St Paul's Cathedral, which had been damaged in the Fire but not destroyed, was undergoing repairs then, requiring masons. House rebuilding too was going on apace; by the end of 1667, only 150 new houses had been constructed, most of which at this time were rented to alehouse-keepers and victuallers serving the incoming building labour force, Strong and Kempster probably among them.<sup>103</sup> By 1672, some 8000 houses had been completed in the City, although to what extent stonemasons were involved in the construction of dwellings is not known.<sup>104</sup> There may also have been work starting in 1671 for masons along the River Fleet, in its canalisation and creation of wharfage, and in street widening.<sup>105</sup> The area west of the City which had been burned in the Fire also

---

<sup>101</sup> GL, MSS 323, 25,471/16, 25,539/1, 4425, 2791, 4072, and 3149; TNA, AO1/2492/398.

<sup>102</sup> GL, MSS 22,607, 11,655, 5,502, 4650, 11,505a and 34,348.

<sup>103</sup> Leo Hollis, *The Phoenix: St Paul's Cathedral and the Men who made Modern London* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2008), p. 151.

<sup>104</sup> Porter, p. 127.

<sup>105</sup> Cooper, p. 166.



needed rebuilding. Reddaway asserts that, in their petitions for freedom in 1670, both Strong and Kempster 'declared that they had been engaged in the rebuilding since the time of the Fire', although as noted in Chapter One, no applications for freedom from 1670 have survived.<sup>106</sup> As Reddaway gives no reference for his statement, it may be an assumption based on the format of information contained in other surviving petitions. The Memorandums and the Daybook, however, indicate that they were active in London only from 1667.

Despite becoming free of the Masons' Company in 1670, as confirmed in its Court Minutes, neither Strong nor Kempster were awarded a City church contract until 1672. Analysing the background of the mason-contractors known to have been given those contracts (Figure 34), all were without doubt London-trained, apart from Thomas Wise senior, who took the contracts for St Michael Wood Street and St Nicholas Cole Abbey.<sup>107</sup> Knoop and Jones suggest that Wise originated from the Isle of Portland, although he had worked as a contractor at Greenwich already in 1664, and carried out paving work at Whitehall after the Fire, so was not a newcomer to London.<sup>108</sup> The bias in favour of London masons was even more pronounced in municipal work, noted above.

The absence of evidence of Strong and Kempster's work in London prompted Knoop and Jones to surmise that they spent the years 1670-72, selling stone,

---

<sup>106</sup> Reddaway, p. 126, footnote; author's correspondence with LMA, 2009.

<sup>107</sup> Jeffery, p. 314.

<sup>108</sup> *London Mason*, p. 35.

although they do not state which records they checked.<sup>109</sup> Kempster's Daybook records his business in Burford, giving no specific details of his London work. The fact that Strong, when he went up to London, took masons with him, and that both he and Kempster took on an apprentice each in London in April 1671, seventeen months before they were engaged at St Stephen Walbrook, testifies that they were not only selling stone but actively involved in building work.<sup>110</sup> It is very likely that Strong and Kempster worked under the umbrella of London mason-contractors, maybe even gaining experience in building some of the many churches started before 1672. Indeed, it is most improbable that Wren would have included Kempster in the contract for St Stephen Walbrook unless his reliability was proven.

## **ASSESSMENT OF STRONG'S AND KEMPSTER'S SUCCESS IN LONDON**

Strong and Kempster's success in winning the contract for St Stephen Walbrook marked a new phase in their careers, placing them in the select group of mason-contractors who were consistently awarded commissions for some of the most important building projects of the period.

By the time the contract for St Stephen Walbrook was to be let, however, substantial arrears of payment had already accrued to mason-contractors rebuilding City churches.<sup>111</sup> St Stephen's was the first church built 'on the extraordinary', being

---

<sup>109</sup> *London Mason*, p. 45.

<sup>110</sup> GL, MS 5313.

<sup>111</sup> Jeffery, p. 48.

authorised by the Commission for rebuilding the churches but financed by the Vestry until the Commission's finances improved sufficiently to reimburse the expenditure and assume responsibility for the remaining construction.<sup>112</sup> Such relative insecurity of funding doubtless discouraged many potential contractors, especially those who were committed to other contracts already, mainly London masons. This would have opened up the field for provincial, first-time contractors such as Strong and Kempster, who in order to enter the market were willing to take on such a risk, sharing it as partners.

It is notable that none of the mason-contractors for the previous twenty churches funded directly by the Commission chose to contract as partners. The wait for Strong and Kempster's first contract, and the risk involved, proved rewarding, however; St Stephen Walbrook was to be the first domed church in England, and the most complex in design of all the City churches.<sup>113</sup> Tributes to this church abound in the literature; it was Wren's 'Master-piece', according to *Parentalia*, Pevsner describing it as 'the most majestic of Wren's parish churches'.<sup>114</sup> The sculptor Antonio Canova is reported to have told Lord Burlington that there was nothing to touch it in Rome.<sup>115</sup> As a first contract, this was remarkable, unlikely to have been given to untried masons.

This soon led to Strong and Kempster taking on further church rebuilding, this time as individual contractors, Kempster at St James Garlickhythe, awarded in 1676, and

---

<sup>112</sup> Jeffery, p. 47.

<sup>113</sup> Jeffery, p. 340.

<sup>114</sup> *Parentalia*, p. 318; Pevsner, p. 177.

<sup>115</sup> Kerry Downes, *A Thousand Years of the Church of St Stephen Walbrook*, church leaflet.

Strong at St Benet Paul's Wharf two years later. Both were similarly built on the extraordinary. The distinction between building on the 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' had disappeared by the time Strong took the contract for St Augustine Old Change in 1680, and Kempster, for St Mary Abchurch in 1681.<sup>116</sup> In 1675, Strong was awarded one of the two highly prestigious masonry contracts for rebuilding St Paul's Cathedral, the other mason-contractor being Joshua Marshall, the King's Master Mason. By 1678, Strong was employing thirty-five men on this contract alone.<sup>117</sup> St Paul's Cathedral was to engage Burford Masons well beyond the parameters of this chapter until at least 1718 when William Kempster died.

Strong and Kempster, heads of their family firms and the first of their dynasties to go up to London, were followed shortly afterwards by Strong's younger brothers John and Edward, and Kempster's son William. None of these are known to have taken contracts of their own in the period up to 1681. The eight apprentices Strong and Kempster took on during this period were all from the provinces, mostly from their home area. The subject of apprentices is explored in Chapter Six.

As a different measure of their success, an attempt is now made to assess their financial rewards for their London work. The value of Strong's work and sales of stone in London up to 1681 in respect of St Stephen Walbrook, St Benet Paul's Wharf, St Paul's, and private work, was estimated by his younger brother Edward at around £26,675, averaging out at just under two thousand pounds for each of the

---

<sup>116</sup> Jeffery, p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, Masons' Company Court Book.

fourteen years.<sup>118</sup> This sum, however, included receipts for 'Great Quantitys' of stone supplied to Windsor. Edward does not specify whether his estimate represents gross receipts, or profit after expenses such as labour, nor does he put a figure on the few months Thomas worked at St Augustine Old Change. By contrast, a master mason working six days a week at London rates could have earned around thirty-five pounds a year, amounting to some £490 over the same fourteen-year period. In view of the ambiguity of Edward's estimate, however, a reliable assessment cannot be made.

In respect of Kempster's work at St Stephen Walbrook and St James Garlickhythe, the building accounts provide payment figures for his labour and stone supply totalling around five thousand pounds, out of which he would have paid his workforce.<sup>119</sup> His Daybook carefully records the frequent shipping of stone from Burford in the early years when establishing the operation, albeit usually in terms of quantity rather than receipts, but the entries taper in detail from the mid-1670s, making it an increasingly inadequate source for quantifying the amount sold and assessing its importance.

In view of the patchy evidence, a meaningful assessment of the financial value of Strong and Kempster's masonry work and stone-selling in these first London years could not be established.

---

<sup>118</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>119</sup> GL, MS 2550, City church expenses, fols 15 and 16.

## CONCLUSION

The above exploration has shown that Strong and Kempster lost little time in taking up the business opportunities which the Great Fire, and subsequent legislation, opened up for provincial masons. Their incentives for this were found to include a greatly expanded market for the sale of their stone, higher rates of pay, and building on their established association with Wren. The date for Strong venturing up to London is intimated in the Memorandums, and I have ascertained, by analysis of the Daybook, the earliest date of Kempster's activity in London. Both reveal that Strong and Kempster were shipping their stone for the London rebuilding within a year of the Great Fire, placing them in the vanguard of stone suppliers. The quality of their stone made it marketable in London, but it was the proximity of their quarries for transport down the Thames, and the fact that this established infrastructure could usually accommodate adverse seasonal forces, which made their stone competitive. The speed of their response reveals their flexibility, entrepreneurial motivation, and readiness to expand their businesses into a new London market.

Almost certainly resulting from Strong's earlier association with Wren, they were entrusted with the most prestigious City church, biding their time for two years after the 1670 Act whilst London masons were awarded contracts. It was the first contract let on the extraordinary, insecurely funded, showing their courage and determination to enter the City church rebuilding market. As partners, they

withstood the payment problems of this contract well enough to go on to embrace other City churches as sole contractors on the same insecure basis.

Although their financial success in this early period is inconclusive owing to patchy evidence, these years were the foundation of the Burford Masons' later success, enabling them to become some of the biggest players in the London rebuilding. They learned to adapt to a new working environment, which was to lead to the Burford Masons becoming large-scale businessmen and financiers. These aspects will be explored in the following chapters, in particular, working practices in Chapter Four, followed by financing issues in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### **BUSINESS ORGANISATION: EMPLOYMENT**

#### INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines changing employment practices, in particular the effects of the gradual shift from employing masons by direct labour to engaging them under the contracting system. Finding employment under both systems, the Burford Masons' first-hand experience is likely to reveal contemporary working practices. Questions will be addressed such as how they operated under these very different methods of employment, to what extent their contract terms evolved over the period, and the means by which they obtained their commissions. This chapter is closely related to Chapter Five, which explores one particular problem arising from the contracting system, that of dilatory payments.

Studies encompassing employment practices during the research period include James W.P. Campbell's *Building St Paul's*, focusing particularly on masons and carpenters.<sup>1</sup> In an earlier paper, Campbell examined seventeenth-century bricklayers' contracts for City churches, looking at their various terms.<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Airs scrutinised methods of employing craftsmen for country house building in a slightly earlier period, also undergoing transition.<sup>3</sup> Howard Colvin's examination of the accounts of the Townesend

---

<sup>1</sup> *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> 'Seventeenth-Century Bricklayers' Contracts: Wren's City Churches', *Construction History Society Newsletter*, 64 (2002), 7-12.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995)



masters of Oxford sets out principal forms of engagement for master builders in the early eighteenth century, with a view to investigating the Townesend's profit margins.<sup>4</sup> This chapter, in examining the Burford Masons' experience, goes beyond these studies, drawing on a wide range of sources and extending the parameters of period, geography, client base and building type. In addition, the unusual continuity of one group of contractors (Burford Masons) with one person in charge of allocating many of the contracts (Sir Christopher Wren) provides a rare opportunity to investigate the development of employment practices, including contract terms.

Neither direct labour nor contracting systems were new in the seventeenth century. Knoop and Jones noted that even during the Middle Ages, masons carried out smaller jobs or parts of larger ones by contract, and substantial building works by direct labour.<sup>5</sup> By the early sixteenth century, contracting was increasingly used for larger works, like completing the chapels of St George's, Windsor, and King's College, Cambridge, where earlier work had been by direct labour. Malcolm Airs points out that country house building, which had previously used direct labour, increasingly adopted the contracting system from the later sixteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Knoop and Jones observed that by the seventeenth century, it was becoming rare for masons in London to be employed by direct labour, one of the last major buildings erected even partly on that system being the Banqueting House, Whitehall, in 1619-22.

---

<sup>4</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> 'The Sixteenth-Century Mason', *AQC*, 50 (1937), 191-210 (pp. 192-3).

<sup>6</sup> Airs, p. 62.

They claimed that in London the direct labour system was 'almost universally displaced by the contract system' after the Great Fire.<sup>7</sup>

The main documents drawn upon in this chapter include the building accounts and other records of institutions, such as the various commissions for rebuilding the City churches, St Paul's Cathedral, Greenwich Hospital, and the Queen Anne churches; the Office of Works, Oxford colleges, the College of Arms, and Abingdon Borough Council. Some of these collections are incomplete, such as the contracts for City churches, of which only a third of those granted to the Burford Masons have survived. Building accounts can often, but not always, indicate the method of employment used. Examination of documents relating to freemasonry, with a view to ascertaining the Burford Masons' involvement, is limited due to the wilful destruction of records in 1720, lest they fell into 'strange hands'.<sup>8</sup>

The chapter attempts to throw light on working practices by examining the Burford Masons' employment and analysing their contracts. It starts by setting out Wren's three categories under which masons were employed at the time, which have been adopted in the literature as a basis of discussion and as tools for examining building practice.<sup>9</sup> Following this tradition, Wren's categories are applied as a framework to examine the Burford Masons' experience, drawing on a range of primary sources, many hitherto unexplored in this context.

---

<sup>7</sup> *London Mason*, pp. 19, 39.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Conder Jnr, *Records of the Hole Crafte and Fellowship of Masons* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1894), p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> See *Dictionary*, pp. 18-19; Colvin, 'Townesends', p. 53; Airs, pp. 57-63; Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City 1660-1720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 86; Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 298.

An examination of the Burford Masons' surviving contract documents follows, as they provide best evidence of their contemporary conditions of employment. Seven aspects of these contracts are scrutinised, noting developments to meet contemporary needs. Finally, the main criteria upon which they won their contracts are explored, being by competition, by size of workforce, and by networking.

### **THE BURFORD MASONS' EMPLOYMENT IN THE LIGHT OF WREN'S '3 WAYES OF WORKING'**

Wren, in his letter of 25 June 1681 to Bishop Fell of Oxford, described contemporary methods of employing building craftsmen, summarising 'there are 3 wayes of working; by the Day, by Measure, by Great' (Figure 43).<sup>10</sup> Working by the day, or payment of workers at day rates, was usually found within a direct labour framework.<sup>11</sup> This simple arrangement would not generally warrant a written agreement. Work both by great and by measure, carrying far more onerous conditions, usually involved the mason taking on a contract setting out both parties' obligations. Instead of being a wage-earner with a weekly income, the mason thereby became a contractor with clearly specified responsibilities.

---

<sup>10</sup> CCM, MS 376.

<sup>11</sup> Airs, p. 57; Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 298.

### Wren's category 'by the Day'

Under the direct labour system, a mason was recruited and engaged on a daily basis by the client, who usually also arranged for the provision of building materials. Airs noted that masons employed on daily or weekly wage rates were paid at the end of the working week, on a Saturday, for the number of days worked.<sup>12</sup> The client had to pay his craftsmen promptly, as without wages work would cease.<sup>13</sup> The mason working under this system could expect regular income for as long as he was hired. His overheads were simply those of a jobbing craftsman, responsibilities and risks such as recruiting a sufficient workforce, administration of the men, and finding the wherewithal to pay them, resting with the client. This system was particularly suited to masons with limited financial resources who relied on a weekly income. The financial benefit to the mason, however, was limited to his weekly wage, with little opportunity to make a profit.

For craftsmen with greater financial resources, contracting, either by great or by measure, was viewed as more profitable. This is highlighted by the case of Richard Jenings, who, despite being in charge of the most important carpentry contract in England between 1706 and 1711, the dome of St Paul's, was employed on daywork terms.<sup>14</sup> Jenings made repeated requests to be employed by measure, which Wren refused, finding daywork much cheaper for the client, besides giving Wren more control over the numbers of men on site.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Airs, p. 172.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House, 1660-1880* (London: Hambledon, 2000), p. 301.

<sup>14</sup> James W.P. Campbell, *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', p. 53; Campbell, 'Finances', p. 337.

Under the direct labour system, the client enjoyed the flexibility of deploying his workforce as he wished, or laying men off at short notice; the mason in his turn was not tied to the job, allowing him mobility to seek more attractive employment. The client would then be left with work unfinished, the task of finding and retaining other masons possibly proving difficult, even in stone-producing areas where they could be in short supply.<sup>16</sup> During the building of Dyrham Park, Gloucestershire, the master mason reported in 1701 that masons were 'very scarce' within a radius of forty miles, an area comprising a large part of the Cotswolds west of Burford, where the Strongs and the Kempsters were still operating. The mobility enjoyed by craftsmen, to the detriment of the abandoned employer, was likely to have been a major reason for the rise of the contracting system.

Direct labour was best suited to the client with adequate financial resources, competent staff for administration, and access to a sufficient supply of craftsmen. However, even in optimal circumstances, the system did not provide sufficient incentive for the mason to complete work expeditiously, a disadvantage which the architect Sir Roger Pratt highlighted in his advice on building in 1665, writing 'If workmen be employed by day, they will make but small haste to finish the building'.<sup>17</sup> So it is not surprising that a system which transferred at least some of the client's burdens on to the craftsman, as the contract system did, appeared attractive to the client, favouring its increased use.

---

<sup>16</sup> Wilson and Mackley, p. 165.

<sup>17</sup> *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, ed. by R.T. Gunther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 87.

## **The Burford Masons' experience of working 'by Day'**

Two case studies will be used to throw light on the Burford Masons' involvement in employment by day, at Canterbury Quad, St John's College, Oxford, and at St Paul's Cathedral.

### ***Canterbury Quadrangle, St John's College, Oxford***

The first building on which any of the Burford Masons are known to have worked was Lord Danvers's Cornbury Park, the largest mansion in Oxfordshire at the time, judging from the *Hearth Tax Returns*.<sup>18</sup> Timothy, Valentine, and William Strong had been engaged since 1631 on Nicholas Stone's designs for the 'South Front (& end) [...] with the Vaults Cellars Great Hall and Rooms adjoining to the Same'.<sup>19</sup> They left Cornbury to work on Canterbury Quad at St John's College, Oxford, probably in 1634. John Lufton, College Fellow, paymaster and keeper of the building accounts, recorded alongside the Strong's names: 'These I fecht out of my Ld Danvers' worcke beyond Burford'.<sup>20</sup> The fact that they were able to leave Cornbury to work elsewhere suggests that at Cornbury they were employed by day, and it can be seen from St John's building accounts that they went on to be employed on daywork terms there.<sup>21</sup> Enticement of masons away from the service of others was not unknown, recorded for instance in the mid-sixteenth century at Longleat, Wiltshire.<sup>22</sup> The Strong's being prepared to shift employment in this way

---

<sup>18</sup> *Hearth Tax Returns, Oxfordshire 1665*, ed. by Maureen Weinstock (n.p.: Oxford Record Society, 1940), p. xv.

<sup>19</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>20</sup> SJCA, MUN LXXXI.2, fol. 18.

<sup>21</sup> SJCA, MUN.LXXXI.2.

<sup>22</sup> Airs, pp. 75-6.

suggests that enticement was so commonplace that the move was unlikely to affect their reputation adversely, although by 1634, work at Cornbury was nearing completion. For the talented, daywork gave masons the opportunity to advance themselves elsewhere.

The Strongs were enticed from Cornbury by higher wages, Lufton recording alongside Valentine and Thomas Strong's names: 'These men would not come but at Extraordinary Rates: w<sup>ch</sup> I yielded to give them'. The building accounts reveal that the Strongs were paid over seven percent more than other masons working on Canterbury Quad, two shillings and sixpence instead of the two shillings and fourpence others received.<sup>23</sup> So as not to have to pay all their master masons similarly high wages, Lufton kept secret the rates paid to the Strongs, 'but concealed from ye other workemen according to whose Rates Mr Jackson payed them I made up the rest to them afterwards', the accounts continue. The fact that the Strongs alone were paid more indicates that they were highly regarded, a conclusion endorsed by their previous employment on the prestigious mansion Cornbury. These early references to the work of the Burford Masons show that already in the 1630s they were masons of standing in the region with bargaining power and able to benefit from the mobility which direct labour offered.

The question arises as to why Lufton sought out masons in the Cotswolds rather than using Oxford masons. The choice might reflect on his reluctance to use Oxford craftsmen, who had formed their own 'closed-shop' Company of Freemasons, Carpenters, Joiners and Slaters of the City of Oxford in 1604.<sup>24</sup> Other Oxford colleges such as Wadham and Merton had similarly resisted using Oxford masons earlier in the century

<sup>23</sup> SJCA, MUN.LXXXI.2, fol. 26.

<sup>24</sup> T.W. Hanson, 'Halifax Builders in Oxford', *Halifax Antiquarian Society Transactions*, (1928), 253-317, pp. 265-6.

and brought masons in from as far afield as Halifax in Yorkshire and Somerset. Between November 1634 and December 1635, Lufton made repeated journeys to Burford to find more workmen, indicating that Burford was considered a source of good masons, trained in the quarries there.<sup>25</sup> These excursions support Colvin's observation that the College had a good deal of trouble managing and engaging masons, even in the stone-producing area of Oxford.<sup>26</sup> They also illustrate the client's burden under the direct labour system of finding workmen.

### ***St Paul's Cathedral***

It is not until later in the century, in London, that further evidence is to be found of Burford Masons working by day. During the running of their contracts by measure at St Paul's, Burford Masons, like other craftsmen, were also paid per day for 'task work' not included in their contracts, such as routine sawing of Portland stone for paving, which went on for many years.<sup>27</sup> The Burford Masons would have men on site working on the main contract and could probably transfer their duties to these smaller jobs easily.

Between 1707 and 1709, when the need arose to repair the vaults which had started to crack from differential settlement under the weight of the pillars and the dome, Wren chose daywork for employing William Kempster and his team. Each mason in the team was paid direct by the Commission, freeing William from the responsibility of finding the money to pay the men himself (Figure 44).<sup>28</sup> This must have been welcome after carrying

---

<sup>25</sup> SJCA, MUN.LXXXI.2.

<sup>26</sup> Howard Colvin, *The Canterbury Quadrangle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> GL, MS 25,473/39.

<sup>28</sup> GL, MS 25,473; KvW.



the burden of dilatory payments as contractor at St Paul's, discussed in the next chapter.<sup>29</sup> It is likely that the repair work could not be estimated in advance, as neither the extent of the damage nor the cost of its remedy would have been assessable before work started, and so was unsuited to contract work. It is also possible that Wren did not wish to bring the work, the necessity of which would not reflect well on him, to the Commission's attention by ratifying a formal contract. However, in 1708 Edward Strong junior was similarly heading a team at St Paul's on direct labour terms, carrying out such work as fluting the columns at the north and south porticos, all tasks which could be easily estimated.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Other London work***

Although masons' work in rebuilding the City churches was contracted by measure, incidences of payment by day are also found in the accounts as well for items not included in the main contract. Edward Strong junior for instance, was paid by day at St Christopher-le-Stocks for small jobs such as cutting holes in the masonry for the carpenters' scaffolds, and removing iron cramps from masonry, probably in early 1712 (Figure 45).<sup>31</sup> Daywork payments to Edward Strong junior are also found in respect of the Queen Anne churches once the main contracts were completed, for instance for paving St John Smith Square in 1724-5.<sup>32</sup> Such items were not priced in the contract, but

---

<sup>29</sup> *Second Part of Fact against Scandal: In Answer to a Pamphlet Intitled a Continuation of Frauds and Abuses at St Paul's*, ed. by John Morphew (London: Morphew, 1713), p. 76.

<sup>30</sup> GL, MS 25,473/41.

<sup>31</sup> GL, MS 25,473/41, fol. 38.

<sup>32</sup> LPL, MS 2700, fol. 80.

agreed with the Commission's surveyors.<sup>33</sup> At Blenheim too, the Strongs were paid by day for work outside their contract.<sup>34</sup>

Edward Strong junior's employment on daywork terms at the Queen's House, Greenwich, does not appear to have been incidental to a contract, however. Over the period 1716-19 he carried out relatively routine work such as laying paving, constructing steps and hearths, and fashioning the occasional chimneypiece.<sup>35</sup> Despite being daywork, he only received full settlement in 1721, tardy payment being common practice with the King's Works.<sup>36</sup>

Although much of the Burford Masons' daywork in London involved tasks incidental to their main contracts, some commissions, such as William Kempster's work on St Paul's vaults, were significant undertakings. The fact that major mason-contractors such as these took on daywork in London in addition to their contracts, undermines Knoop and Jones's assumption that the direct labour system had been almost universally displaced in post-Fire London.<sup>37</sup>

### **Wren's category 'by Great'**

---

<sup>33</sup> David T. Yeomans, 'Managing Eighteenth-Century Building', *Construction History*, 4 (1988), 3-19 (p. 12).

<sup>34</sup> BL, Add.MSS 19,595, fol. 5.

<sup>35</sup> TNA, PRO ADM 68/874 & 875.

<sup>36</sup> *HKW*, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> *London Mason*, p. 39.

Contracting by great most closely resembled the modern lump sum contract.<sup>38</sup> Under this system, the mason-contractor undertook to carry out specified work from start to finish for a fixed sum released upon completion, although small stage payments were sometimes released during construction. At one end of the spectrum, the mason's contract might cover all trades needed to complete the building, the mason then subcontracting work he was unable to execute himself. Less onerously, it could be for mason's work only. Several masons might be granted contracts for different sections of the same building. The mason-contractor needed capital to finance the undertaking, a prerequisite which would discourage most masons from venturing into such a commitment.

It is perhaps significant that only one contract for building a City church was let by great, that for St Swithin London Stone in 1677.<sup>39</sup> Joshua Marshall was the contractor, who died the following year leaving an estate of over £14,000, placing him among the richest men in London and certainly wealthy enough to withstand the risks of funding such a contract.<sup>40</sup> Estimating the costs correctly at the outset was of vital importance, as a mason-contractor who found he had underestimated might cut costs and skimp on workmanship or materials so as not to find himself out of pocket, or at worst ruin himself financially, as Wren pointed out.<sup>41</sup> Masons successfully contracting by great charged higher rates to protect themselves from this risk.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander D. Curtis, 'Sir Christopher Wren's City Churches: A Critical Reappraisal' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Princeton, 1995), p. 114.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> CCM, MS 376.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 298.

### **The Burford Masons' experience of contracting 'by Great'**

The earliest surviving building contract for any of the Burford Masons, indeed for any Gloucestershire country house, is that dated 23 January 1656 between Valentine Strong and Sir Richard Whitmore, for building Lower Slaughter Manor House (Figure 46).<sup>43</sup> The contract is by great, for mason's work only in building the shell of the house and some details, but excludes certain showier work such as specified chimneypieces left for later completion, probably by London masons. However, the agreed payment for Strong's work, two hundred pounds, was to be released in weekly instalments. Weekly payments would not be financially dissimilar to working by day, except that Strong would have had his own team to find and pay. Payment by instalments released Strong from carrying his costs over until completion, which would have been particularly welcome during the relatively precarious times of the Commonwealth. The contract stated that within the two hundred pounds' payment, all the freestone for finishes, such as quoins, windows and doors were to be supplied from the Strongs' quarries, which would have further offset Strong's overheads.

After the Restoration, Valentine's eldest son Thomas constructed the north building in Garden Quad, Trinity College, Oxford, with partner Thomas Minchin. The College's accounts show Strong and Minchin to have been contractors, not employed under direct

---

<sup>43</sup> GA, D45/E17; Nicholas Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire Volume One, 1500-1660* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001), p. 20.

labour.<sup>44</sup> They were, however, paid intermittently, at irregular intervals, but it is not clear from the accounts on what basis those payments were released.

In 1681, Christopher Kempster was engaged to build Tom Tower, Oxford, in partnership with Christ Church's mason Thomas Robinson. The final contract is not extant but surviving heads of terms quote a lump sum for the total work (by great), made up of individual prices for the various elements of construction.<sup>45</sup> In the event, Christ Church paid Kempster and other masons weekly on the basis of days worked, resulting in a hybrid arrangement, part by great, part by day.<sup>46</sup> This must have been particularly valuable to Kempster at a time when he was kept waiting a considerable time for payment for his work in London. Notably, Fell did not act on Wren's recommendation of contracting by measure; perhaps Fell simply followed the college's usual way of getting work done.

In all three cases payment was released to the mason-contractor whilst the contract was running, which recognised the potentially awkward position of the mason as temporary financier. Such an arrangement also mitigated against the situation about which Wren cautioned, that an overstretched mason might skimp on his work, observing 'they doe often injure themselves, and when they begin to find it, they shuffle and shift the worke to save themselves'.<sup>47</sup> Wren was designer and advisor on both Tom Tower and Garden Quad, and it is possible that intermittent release of payment was on his advice, a conscious attempt to avoid overstretching the mason-contractors.

---

<sup>44</sup> TCA, III E/I, Receipts and Disbursements of Bursars from 1665.

<sup>45</sup> CCM, MS 376.

<sup>46</sup> CCM, Bills 1679-1681.

<sup>47</sup> CCM, MS 376.

In 1679 Kempster embarked on building County Hall, Abingdon, Berkshire, where he is referred to as the 'undertaker' of the work in the building accounts.<sup>48</sup> No contract is extant. The term 'undertaker' is an example of the problem of nomenclature identified in Chapter One. In his correspondence with Bishop Fell, Wren used the term in connection with contracting by great, and it is also found in the Oxford mason William Byrd's contract by great for constructing Garden Building at New College, Oxford (1681-5), also built by great.<sup>49</sup> The building accounts for County Hall reveal that payments were released during the three-year construction period, albeit infrequently, another example of a hybrid arrangement. The fact that stone from Kempster's quarry was used extensively at County Hall, as it was at Tom Tower, would have helped offset the wait for payment, making such a contract more viable.

It is known from an application for, and grant of, a faculty in 1687 (Figure 47), that Christopher Kempster built the side chapel known as the Perrott aisle at St Mary's, North Leigh, Oxfordshire (Figure 26). The terms of that commission, including the pattern of payment release, are not known, but Kempster appears to have contracted by great as he is again referred to as the 'undertaker' of the works by the client Sir James Perrott.<sup>50</sup>

In London, contracts for the demolition of City churches prior to rebuilding were often let by great, such as that to Thomas Strong at St Stephen Walbrook, dated 16 September 1672.<sup>51</sup> It is likely that in accepting this relatively modest demolition contract, the

---

<sup>48</sup> ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts.

<sup>49</sup> CCM, MS 376; NCA, MSS. 951 and 1168.

<sup>50</sup> ORO, MSS Oxf. Dioc. c45, fol. 103, and Oxf. Dioc. c105, fol. 10.

<sup>51</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2, fol. 48.

payment for which totalled seventy pounds, he already expected to be granted the contract for rebuilding the church, as he and Christopher Kempster received an imprest (or advance) in respect of that work only a month later.<sup>52</sup>

Ephraim Beauchamp undertook to build the east wing of the College of Arms in 1687 by great, for a lump sum of forty pounds in addition to a sixty-one year lease of the building (Figure 48).<sup>53</sup> It may be that Ephraim's carpenter brother Benjamin was also involved in the construction; contracting by great required a close working knowledge of other crafts, generally favouring families whose members were skilled in different building trades, such as the Beauchamps. Only Ephraim, as contractor, is named in the accounts, however.

The Burford Masons appear to have entered into remarkably few contracts by great in London, probably discouraged by the need to fund the construction initially; it is also likely that there were fewer contracts of that type available. In the provinces, the problem of funding seems to have been mitigated by the client releasing payment whilst the contract was running.

### **Wren's category 'by Measure'**

'The best way in this businesse is to worke by measure' concluded Wren, as the quality, costs and the progress of work could be better monitored by this method.<sup>54</sup> This observation doubtless stemmed from Wren's experience in London, where many

---

<sup>52</sup> GL, MS 25,546/1.

<sup>53</sup> CAA, Chapter Book vol.1.

<sup>54</sup> CCM, MS 376.

provincial masons of generally unknown workmanship had flocked to after the Great Fire, seeking employment.<sup>55</sup> Contracting by measure offered some control over untried performance.

Contracting by measure resembled modern piecework, but within a contract framework.<sup>56</sup> The contracting mason would undertake to build at agreed rates, payment being due according to interim measurements of work executed. With this form of contract, the mason-contractor would in principle only need to find the wages for his workforce for the periods between measurements, providing an incentive to work more expeditiously. In practice, however, although measurements were made, payment was often seriously delayed, an issue explored in the following chapter.

A new type of building specialist was needed to run this kind of contract, someone able to value, measure and check that an agreed section of work had been completed satisfactorily. This person was known as a measurer. Fairly sophisticated skills were required to carry out the work, similar to those of a Quantity Surveyor today.<sup>57</sup> Wren noted that few men were skilled in measuring stone work, 'I have bred up 2 or 3', he wrote, probably including John Scarborough, whom he had employed since 1676.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Walter G. Bell, *The Great Fire of London* (London: Bodley Head, 1951), p. 254.

<sup>56</sup> Airs, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 72.

<sup>58</sup> CCM, MS 376; Anthony Geraghty, 'New Light on the Wren City Churches: The Evidence of the All Souls and Bute Drawings' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1999), p. 38.



### **The Burford Masons' experience of contracting 'By Measure'**

In London, most masons' contracts for rebuilding municipal or ecclesiastical buildings were let by measure.<sup>59</sup> As Wren was in charge of a large number of these contracts, and contracting by measure was his preferred method, its frequency of use is not surprising. The Burford Masons took many contracts by measure, in particular for City churches (figure 40) and St Paul's. St Paul's was particularly suited to this method, as it was constructed by up to six teams of masons working simultaneously on separate sections, and the different tasks and rates of progress could be monitored more effectively this way. Edward Strong's and Christopher Kempster's contracts for Winchester Palace, Hampshire, and the Edward Strong's for the main pile of Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, were also suited to being let by measure, for similar reasons.<sup>60</sup> Other contracts by measure taken by Burford Masons include the Strong's for Greenwich Hospital, and Edward Strong junior's work on over half of the Queen Anne churches.<sup>61</sup>

On the face of it, where costs were to be recouped by stage payments based on measured work, contracting by measure removed the mason's high burden of funding the entire construction until completion, the principle of contracting by great. In practice, however, stage payments were often made far from punctually, effectively placing the mason-contractor in no better position than contracting by great. The Burford Masons held many contracts by measure, often concurrently, so instead of receiving a steady income from

---

<sup>59</sup> *London Mason*, p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fols. 13, 49, 55; TNA, SP24/37/4.

<sup>61</sup> WS, vi (1929), 31-73; LPL, MS 2703.

stage payments, arrears of payment would have accrued from several contracts running at the same time.

Although Scarborough was still employed as measurer by Wren in 1692, it was nonetheless Edward Strong senior whom Wren dispatched to Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, together with master mason Edward Pierce and a Thomas Webb, to measure and check on the work of the chief mason Benjamin Jackson. This was a responsible and sensitive task; Jackson's work at Chatsworth ultimately leading to litigation with his client, the Duke of Devonshire.<sup>62</sup> In view of the skills required, it is not surprising that measurers generally emerged from craft backgrounds.<sup>63</sup>

### **General observations**

The Burford Masons' experience has shown that even where their rebuilding commissions in London were undertaken by contract, as the great majority of them were, they nonetheless carried out significant work on the same buildings by daywork. Some of the work paid by day was far from incidental, such as carrying out repairs to St Paul's vaults, or laying large-scale and intricate paving within buildings, substantial enough to have been included in a contract. This finding qualifies Knoop and Jones's assertion of working practices having moved on to the contracting system, when in fact the transition was shown to be a more complex, ongoing process. Looking at the Burford Masons' work in the provinces, however, a different pattern was shown to be emerging, whereby their main commissions between 1656 and 1681 were found to be hybrid arrangements.

---

<sup>62</sup> WS, XVII (1940), 35; *London Mason*, p. 37.

<sup>63</sup> Airs, p. 62.

## EXAMINATION OF THE BURFORD MASONS' SURVIVING CONTRACTS

Of the many building contracts taken on by the Burford Masons, at least twenty-nine have survived. Included in this number are the heads of terms offered for Tom Tower, details of which Kempster and Robinson sought to amend, making it possible to arrive at an idea of the terms agreed.<sup>64</sup> An analysis of all of these documents can be seen in Figure 49. The agreements span almost seventy years, ranging from the contract for Lower Slaughter Manor in 1656 to that for building the 'west front opposite the King Charles building' at Greenwich Hospital, in 1725, providing an unusually broad and fertile research base.<sup>65</sup>

Five of these contracts are in the form of loose documents, some on parchment, most others written in contract books such as those for the City churches, Winchester Palace, Greenwich Hospital and the Queen Anne churches.<sup>66</sup> The agreements entered in the contract books are signed by contracting craftsmen and appear to be office copies. In respect of City churches, despite Burford Masons being contractors for twenty-three of them, only seven of their rebuilding contracts are known to have survived, and a further one for demolition prior to rebuilding. Those contracts which are no longer extant may have taken the form of loose papers, or were perhaps never even committed to paper but

---

<sup>64</sup> CCM, MS Estates 144, Buildings and Fixtures 1626-1953, fol. 14.

<sup>65</sup> GA, D.45/T.10; TNA, PRO ADM 80/3.

<sup>66</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2; RIBA, WRE 1/2; TNA, PRO ADM 80/2; LPL, MS 2703.

agreed verbally instead, as Campbell suggests.<sup>67</sup> In the case of Lower Slaughter Manor and Tom Tower, the contract and heads of terms are loose papers.

Looking now at clients, three of the twenty-nine contracts were granted by Wren on behalf of the king, in respect of Winchester Palace. A fourth, for Blenheim Palace, was also started as a royal project but continued by the Duke of Marlborough, an issue explored in the following chapter. Only one contract survives with a private individual, that with Richard Whitmore, for Lower Slaughter Manor. All other clients in the surviving contracts were public bodies, ecclesiastical and institutional, namely the Commissions for rebuilding the City churches, and the Fifty New Churches; the Directors of the Hospital of Greenwich; and Christ Church, Oxford.

As most of these contracts relate to ecclesiastical, public or royal buildings, they are not necessarily typical of the average building contract of their period. All but two of their surviving contracts involved Wren, either as Surveyor-General of His Majesty's Works (Winchester Palace), the officer responsible for rebuilding the City churches, Surveyor to Greenwich Hospital, architect of Tom Tower, or, in a lesser capacity, as one of the Commissioners for the Queen Anne churches. Wren's involvement over several decades with most of the contracts under investigation provides a unique basis of investigation founded on continuity and experience, potentially to be reflected in contract terms.

Seven relevant aspects of these contracts will now be examined.

---

<sup>67</sup> Campbell, 'Bricklayers' Contracts', p. 7.

## Form of contract

The earliest contract, for Lower Slaughter Manor, comprises one page only. The contract, as already noted, is by great. The preamble resembles the contract for the demolition of St Stephen Walbrook, also by great. The only other document reflecting on terms of the Burford Masons' engagement by great relates to Tom Tower, where the heads of terms indicate that fixed prices for certain work would have been included in the final contract.

The remaining twenty-six contracts are all by measure, and follow a common format comprising two sections; firstly, an agreement, followed by a schedule usually entitled 'estimate of rates and prizes'. An example of such a contract, for St Benet Paul's Wharf, is shown in Figure 50. The schedule identifies types of work to be carried out, with their respective payment, either as a price per foot ('rates'), for example 'ffor Kentish Ashler [...] at 2s-2d p foot', or as a lump sum ('prizes'), as for instance 'ffor the South Dorecase wrought according to the Designe ...£24:00:00'.<sup>68</sup> The schedule appears to have governed the length of the contract in many cases. Looking at the City church contracts for instance, Christopher Kempster's for stonemasonry only at the brick-built St Mary Abchurch is only two-thirds of a page long (Figure 51), whereas Edward Strong senior's for stonemasonry and brickwork at St Clement Eastcheap runs to three pages (Figure 52).

---

<sup>68</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2, fol. 99.

In respect of carpenters working on City churches, Campbell observed that Wren gave detailed instructions to those he had not worked with before, and became less prescriptive as they learned his methods.<sup>69</sup> Such a pattern has not emerged with the Burford Masons, however, perhaps because they were already known to Wren, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Length of the contract document was not found to relate necessarily to the value of its work, however. Only one of the Burford Masons' contracts for City churches comprises more than two pages, at a time when the average mason-contractor's payment for City churches was £2400.<sup>70</sup> Yet St John Smith Square, the most expensive of all the Queen Anne churches at nearly £41,000, only warranted a shared contract with St Paul, Deptford of just one-and-a-half pages' length.<sup>71</sup> The fact that contractors for Queen Anne churches often sought to vary their terms indicates that these brief contracts proved inadequate for their purpose.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the introduction of new terms in later contracts, analysis has shown that the average length of Burford Masons' contracts, and their general format, varied little. The emphasis, understandably, remained mainly on rates of pay, resulting in only outline specification for works. The brevity of these contracts indicates that much detail was agreed verbally, as favoured by Wren at St Paul's where he held regular Saturday conferences with his chief craftsmen, or in the case of City churches, even delegated

---

<sup>69</sup> Campbell, 'Finances', p. 330.

<sup>70</sup> KJ, *Mediaeval Mason*, p. 42.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: London 6: Westminster* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 680.

<sup>72</sup> *The Commission for Building the Fifty New Churches*, ed. by M.H. Port (n.p.: London Record Society, 1986), p.120.

design decisions to the craftsmen.<sup>73</sup> This reflects trust between the client (as represented by Wren) and contractor, and a flexibility and co-operation which favoured the more experienced contractors such as the Burford Masons. The design input of craftsmen will be explored in Chapter Seven

### **Contracting parties**

In the contract for Lower Slaughter Manor, the contractor Valentine Strong is described simply as 'freemason' (Figure 46). By the time the Burford Masons took on contracts for City churches, both Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster had become Freemen of the City of London, and are referred to in those and subsequent contracts as 'Citizen and Mason of London'.

As has been seen, the majority of the Burford Masons' contracts were granted by public bodies. In the case of City churches, where the client is named, it is as 'The Right Honourables the Commissioners appointed by Act of Parliament'.<sup>74</sup> Wren had been charged by the Commissioners in 1670 to 'contract with [...] Artizans, builders and workmen as shall be employed [...] for the orderly execution of the workes', but was not named as party to the contracts.<sup>75</sup> Despite this, masons contracting for City churches were required to sign a Declaration acknowledging that they would not hold the Commission's officers Wren, Robert Hooke, or John Oliver personally financially responsible.<sup>76</sup> Edward Strong and Christopher Kempster were among those who signed the Declaration (Figure

---

<sup>73</sup> *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London 604-2004*, ed. by Derek Keene, R. Arthur Burns, and Andrew Saint (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 210.

<sup>74</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Jeffery, *The City Churches of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 27.

<sup>76</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2.

53). As arrears of payment had already accrued to mason-contractors within a year of the first contracts being let, this prescient Declaration must have given Wren the confidence to let contracts despite unreliable funding.<sup>77</sup>

In 1706, the Strong's contract to build the main pile of Blenheim Palace was made with 'John Vanbrugh on behalf of his Grace the Duke of Marlborough' (Figure 54).<sup>78</sup>

However, Vanbrugh appears to have made no similar Declaration with his craftsmen, and in 1718 found himself included in the Strong's legal action for recovery of over twelve thousand pounds' arrears, in the event of their suit against the Duke of Marlborough miscarrying. As it turned out, the Strong's claim against the Duke succeeded, but Vanbrugh later found himself among those sued by the Duchess instead.<sup>79</sup>

### **Specification of work**

All the contracts relate to masons' work and supply of stone. The specification of masonry work is limited to the 'rates and prizes' schedule, identifying stone type by quarry origin (for instance, 'Burford'), and the cut of the stone (such as 'superficial' for work on one plane, or 'cirque' for use in arches). In all Burford Masons' contracts, this specification appears to have been sufficiently clear to secure what was required, partly, no doubt, because these contractors were experienced quarrymen, but perhaps also due to the London Masons' Company's continued monitoring of the quality of stone brought into the City. The Company's trade functions are discussed in Chapter Six.

---

<sup>77</sup> Jeffery, p. 48.

<sup>78</sup> TNA, SP 34/37/4.

<sup>79</sup> David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (London: Country Life, 1951), pp. 150, 152.



Four of the Strongs' contracts for City churches, however, also include brickwork: those for St Benet Paul's Wharf, St Augustine Old Change, St Mildred Bread Street, and St Clement Eastcheap.<sup>80</sup> By comparison with the masonry-only contracts, these are more detailed. Bricks, being man-made, are of variable quality, and inadequate specification could result in cost-cutting by the contractor, for instance by over-inclusion of clay, or 'Spanish' (ashes, or ashes with rubbish). All but the contract for St Mildred Bread Street specify the use of the stronger stock bricks for the outside, which were relatively expensive but of more consistent quality and more durable.<sup>81</sup>

Where brick was the predominant building material and left exposed, its particular type and bond would have been of aesthetic importance. Neither the source nor size of brick to be used is specified in any of these contracts. Its type is rarely specified, although in respect of St Clement Eastcheap (Figure 52), clamp bricks are specified for use on splays and arches. Clamp bricks were not uniformly fired, often resulting in one side becoming glazed.<sup>82</sup> Details such as the thickness of the wall (for example, 1<sup>1/2</sup> brick), or number of courses, are found in the contracts for St Augustine's and St Clement Eastcheap.

Similarly, the type of bond to be used in bricklaying is rarely specified in these contracts. The choice in brick bond types was in transition at the time; John Summerson noted that the use of Flemish bond began to overtake English bond in the 1630s, an observation supported by Campbell's analysis of ten bricklaying contracts for City churches, where only one was known to be built in English bond (St Mary-le-Bow), compared with six in

---

<sup>80</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2, fols. 99, 123, 135, 161.

<sup>81</sup> McKellar, pp. 72, 74.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 107.

Flemish.<sup>83</sup> Of the Burford Masons' contracts, only that for St Clement Eastcheap stipulates 'header and stretcher', indicating Flemish bond. St Clement Eastcheap was subsequently rendered, but where brick was to be left exposed, it is unlikely that its bond was of relative unimportance to the architect, as Campbell suggests, but subject to later agreement rather, or simply left to the contractor, giving him an input into design. Edward Strong, for instance, built St Benet Paul's Wharf in Flemish bond, whereas eleven years later, he built St Vedast alias Foster using English bond (Figure 55).

In all these contracts, quality of workmanship was only specified to be carried out 'well and in workmanlike manner', or words to that effect, a contract term which has carried down to this day. The monitoring of standards of workmanship in London had traditionally been exercised by the livery companies, but by the later seventeenth century, the control of the London Masons' Company over workmanship was waning. Legislation had not yet been introduced to regulate standards in the absence of the Company's control.<sup>84</sup> It was during this intermediate period, another example of the transition from medieval to modern practices, that the Burford Masons were taking on major contracts. In the absence of independent control over workmanship, the onus of satisfying this contract term rested firmly with the craftsman, his standard of workmanship being left to custom and practice, and his own ability. Such a situation again favoured highly skilled, experienced men such as the Burford Masons. The fact that Burford Masons went on winning contracts from clients who were aware of their past performance, indicates that their workmanship was at the very least satisfactory. Indeed, William Kempster was

---

<sup>83</sup> *Architecture in Britain 1530-1730* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press., 1993), p. 250; 'Bricklayers' Contracts', p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> Conder, p. 289.

rewarded with an extra twenty pounds for 'Extraordinary dilligence and care used [...] and his good performance' for the carving over the Dean's Door at St Paul's (Figure 19).<sup>85</sup>

The joint contract with Christopher Kempster and Edward Strong for the foundations of Winchester Palace deviates from the standard format in its extraordinary detail.<sup>86</sup> It specifies how the foundations were to be 'Dugg with hard Rubbish well rammed', with flint and ragstone in areas 'where there is any suspicon of softer and hollow veines of Earth'. Even the mortar mix is specified. The inclusion of such detail is likely to stem from Wren's experience some four years earlier of the failing foundations at St Paul's, where part of the vaulting of the crypt collapsed and had to be rebuilt, and also shortly afterwards at Tom Tower, when Bishop Fell embarked upon the foundations against Wren's advice.<sup>87</sup> It is of note that at Winchester, Tom Tower, and St Paul's, it was the Stronges and Kempsters who were entrusted with difficult foundations.

The introduction of additional contract terms borne of experience can also be seen in the issue of saltpetre. Saltpetre is comprised of potassium nitrate, a natural salt which forms a crust on the stone surface, leading to early decay. In 1715, difficulties were experienced with saltpetre in the Portland stone used at Greenwich Hospital. The Commissioners consulted the Stronges as to how to protect against this recurring, since the Stronges were responsible for sourcing the stone they used on site; the Stronges concluded that the only remedy was 'care in observing it'.<sup>88</sup> Nicholas Hawksmoor was Assistant Surveyor at Greenwich Hospital at the time as well as the Surveyor responsible for drawing up

---

<sup>85</sup> GL, MS 25,473/39, fol. 134.

<sup>86</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fol. 13.

<sup>87</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 108; CCM, MS 376.

<sup>88</sup> TNA, PRO ADM 67/4, fols 241-2.

contracts for the Queen Anne churches.<sup>89</sup> It was probably through this connection that Edward Strong junior's contracts for St George, Bloomsbury (1716) and St Michael, Cornhill (1718) went on to stipulate that Portland stone should be 'free from saltpeter'.<sup>90</sup>

In all of the contracts, work was to be completed according to designs or instructions given, or to be given, by the client. There is no indication, however, as to how prescriptive they would turn out to be, and how much designing was left to the contractor. In respect of the City churches, it is Anthony Geraghty's view that mason-contractors were supplied with plans, sections, and probably elevations, but not necessarily with detailed drawings.<sup>91</sup> Whilst this is likely, I have been unable to locate any working drawings in respect of the Burford Masons' commissions. However, with regard to Winchester Palace, Edward Strong senior proudly recorded in his Memorandums that he had 'the Designs of all the Mason's Work [...] committed to his Care by Sr Christopher Wren', probably referring to working drawings.<sup>92</sup>

Specification of design in the Burford Masons' contracts is sometimes vague, such as building 'a Doreway into y<sup>e</sup> Tower as good in all respects and as large as that at the Southside of St Bennett's', found in Thomas Strong's contract for St Augustine Old Change.<sup>93</sup> As Thomas Strong had only recently constructed St Benet Paul's Wharf to Wren's design, this would have been an effective specification.<sup>94</sup> Colvin, however, noted that it was not uncommon for a client to take an existing building as his model,

---

<sup>89</sup> Yeomans, p. 13.

<sup>90</sup> LPL, MS 2703.

<sup>91</sup> Geraghty, pp. 60, 166.

<sup>92</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>93</sup> GL, MS 25,524/2, fol. 124.

<sup>94</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2, fol. 99.

particularly in country areas, presenting the contracting mason with a more difficult task, although the Burford Masons were probably familiar with this practice in their home area.<sup>95</sup> Certainly this freedom of interpretation was not unusual; Ephraim Beauchamp was given even more leeway by the Vestry of St Dunstan-in-the East, instructing him to make two entrances 'in such manner as in Mr Bechamps judgment may be most safe and convenient'.<sup>96</sup> In the case of the Queen Anne churches, the designs were incomplete at the time masons put in their estimates, leaving much to the contractor's judgement as to the risk involved.<sup>97</sup> This again favoured experienced masons who could take a view from incomplete information, and masons who were sufficiently secure financially to withstand the risks of misjudgement.

### **Strength of workforce**

The only contracts under scrutiny which specify the minimum number of men to be kept on site by the contractor are those for Winchester Palace, doubtless because Charles II was in a hurry to see it completed.<sup>98</sup> For the foundations contract, Edward Strong junior and Christopher Kempster were required to keep sixty 'trowellers and setters' besides masons and labourers to supply them in constant work.<sup>99</sup> For their contracts above ground, Strong was required to keep no less than twenty-two masons and setters, and seven sawyers and labourers, Kempster slightly less at eighteen and nine respectively. Analysis of the building accounts confirms that both Strong and Kempster complied with those requirements, Strong even providing four more sawyers than the stipulated

---

<sup>95</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 19.

<sup>96</sup> WS, XIX (1942), 18-19.

<sup>97</sup> *Yeomans*, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> *HKW*, p. 305.

<sup>99</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fols. 13, 49, 55.

minimum.<sup>100</sup> Some thirteen years later, less strict control can be seen over workforce size in the first masons' contract at Greenwich Hospital, which required Edward Strong and Thomas Hill to keep as many workmen on site as the Surveyor considered reasonable.<sup>101</sup>

It is notable that in the case of Winchester Palace, even though the king considered time to be of the essence, powers of royal impressments were not invoked. Those powers, used in respect of masons in particular, were still extant, having been invoked as recently as 1667 to secure men for the royal works at Sheerness.<sup>102</sup> Instead, each of the five mason-contractors engaged at Winchester Palace was able to muster a large enough team to satisfy the king's workforce. The factor of workforce size in competing for contracts is explored below.

### **Provisions for payment**

It was seen above that for two contracts by great outside London, Lower Slaughter Manor and Tom Tower, payment was released weekly, thereby lessening the burden on the contractor. For work by great at Trinity College, Oxford, and County Hall, Abingdon, Berks, payments were released intermittently. The demolition of St Stephen Walbrook, also by great, was for seventy pounds only and of short duration.

The Burford Masons' contracts by measure for rebuilding City churches omit any mention of when measurements or payments are to be made. In view of the monies

---

<sup>100</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fol. 236.

<sup>101</sup> TNA, PRO ADM 80/2.

<sup>102</sup> Airs, p. 75; KJ, *Genesis of Freemasonry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1949), p. 121.

involved, this omission was material and required trust on behalf of the mason-contractor to proceed on this basis. Apart from Winchester Palace, and to a lesser extent Blenheim Palace, none of the contracts by measure identify payment stages. Omission of such fundamental issues suggests that measurement and payment were intended to take place on the traditional quarter days (25 March, 24 June, 29 September, 25 December).

For the Winchester Palace contracts, mason-contractors were advanced a small lump sum, the remaining nine-tenths to be released later. Despite these covenants, an awareness of the possibility of their not being fulfilled can be detected in the provision for the contractor to reduce his workforce if payments ran two months behind in the case of the foundations, or one month behind for the work above ground.<sup>103</sup> The fact that craftsmen's arrears were finally settled twenty-four years after work at Winchester Palace ceased, shows that the contractors did not exercise that prerogative. Even the inclusion of payment dates in a contract did not ensure that the client would adhere to them.

The Strongs' contract for the main pile at Blenheim Palace provided for payments to be made so as not to leave them carrying more than five hundred pounds' arrears.<sup>104</sup> As it turned out, over nine thousand pounds' arrears were owed to the Strongs, even though their contract contained the condition that they should work expeditiously only if they were 'not hindered by [...] reasonable supply of money'.<sup>105</sup> Despite their unsettled dues, the Strongs worked on at Blenheim at Vanbrugh's request for some time after the Crown

---

<sup>103</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fols. 13-15, 54.

<sup>104</sup> TNA, PRO SP 34/37/4.

<sup>105</sup> TNA, PRO SP 34/37/4.

had made its final payment in 1711.<sup>106</sup> Reasons why the Stronges allowed so great a debt to build up are explored in the following chapter.

Despite carrying heavy arrears, the Burford Masons similarly worked on at Winchester Palace, the City churches, and St Paul's. At Greenwich Hospital, where despite being ordered to stop work on the King William staircase by the Hospital's Commissioners in 1720, Edward Strong junior preferred to complete the job, even waiving payment of interest on it, although he was already owed almost £8500 for his work at the Hospital.<sup>107</sup> The Stronges were clearly in a financial position to carry over substantial arrears of pay, but these examples do reflect their willingness to go beyond their contractual obligations. With these qualities, the Burford Masons must have recommended themselves greatly. However, their purpose in giving more than contractually necessary is exposed as seed-corn for attracting further contracts as, when the Directors of Greenwich Hospital refused to renew Edward Strong junior's contract in 1729, Strong submitted a claim a month later for £1038 interest on his arrears.<sup>108</sup>

### **Completion dates**

A fixed timescale for completion is only found in four of the contracts: in the three for Winchester Palace, and that proposed for Tom Tower. For Tom Tower, the completion date was to be Michaelmas (the autumn quarter day falling on 29 September) 1682, but this was probably renegotiated after partners Kempster and Robinson requested 'a longer

---

<sup>106</sup> Green, p. 138.

<sup>107</sup> Green, p. 145.

<sup>108</sup> TNA, PRO ADM 67/7.



time to finish'.<sup>109</sup> Wren's correspondence with Fell makes no mention of a completion date not having been complied with, so the condition may be assumed to have been satisfied. The inclusion of a completion date for Winchester Palace is unsurprising, in view of the king's urgency. The foundations were to be completed by Michaelmas 1683. Michaelmas was favoured as a cut-off date before colder weather set in and building work became more difficult, due particularly to lime not setting at lower temperatures. Strong's and Kempster's contracts for the east and west fronts at Winchester required them to complete by 15 July 1684, save for Strong's 'frontice peece' which had to be finished by 10 October that year. These dates for the completion of masons' work appear to have been adhered to, as the king is reported to have said shortly before his death in February 1685 'I shall be most happy this week, for my building will be covered with lead'.<sup>110</sup> His death, however, brought to a halt the outstanding work to make the Palace ready for occupation. The extent to which the west front, which Kempster worked on, was finished can be seen in a drawing made by a French prisoner-of-war in 1762 (Figure 20).

A specified completion date also had consequences on the size of workforce needed to be deployed to satisfy the requirement.

### **Resolution of differences**

Already by 1680, Wren appears to have been alert to the risk of disputes arising in the building process, as provision was introduced in Strong's contract for St Augustine Old

---

<sup>109</sup> CCM, MS Estates 144, fol. 14.

<sup>110</sup> HKW, p. 310.

Change for any differences to be resolved by his colleagues Hooke and Oliver, a clause repeated in that for St Mildred Bread Street the following year.<sup>111</sup> Around the same time, the heads of terms for Tom Tower also provided for disputes to be submitted for determination by Wren.<sup>112</sup> In the Winchester contracts just two years later, disputes were to be referred to the Officers of His Majesty's Works, which of course included Wren as Surveyor-General.<sup>113</sup> The only other Burford Masons' contracts providing for resolution of disputes are those for Greenwich Hospital, but only with effect from 1706 after the Commission had gained ten years' contracting experience. At first these contracts referred disputes to Wren, later contracts referring disputes to at least two persons chosen by each party.<sup>114</sup> This shows a gradual recognition of the contractor's situation.

Despite providing a mechanism for resolving disputes, these earlier contracts contain no penalty for non-compliance. Airs points out that even in the 1640s, contracts for country houses occasionally included a financial penalty for non-compliance, constituting a substantial proportion of the total payment, around 18%.<sup>115</sup> Such omission in Wren's contracts suggests a residual trust between client and contractor. It is not until contracts of 1716 and 1718, in respect of the floor at St Alfege and the tower of St Michael Cornhill respectively, that penalties for non-compliance with the conditions of the contract are found. In both cases, the penalty was dismissal.<sup>116</sup> It would seem that by then, trust and co-operation were found to be inadequate tools with which to run large contracts.

---

<sup>111</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2.

<sup>112</sup> CCM, MS Estate 144, fol. 14.

<sup>113</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fols. 49, 55.

<sup>114</sup> TNA, PRO, ADM 80/2.

<sup>115</sup> Airs, *The Making of the English Country House 1500-1640* (London: Architectural Press, 1975), p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> LPL, MSS 2747/20 and 2749/2.

No evidence has been found of the Burford Masons giving cause for the formal dispute mechanism in contracts to be activated, or more seriously, of their dismissal. Again, this indicates that clients found their work consistently satisfactory.

### **General observations**

The contracts examined, spanning almost seven decades, have been shown to generally increase in value without a reciprocal increase in length or complexity.

The absence of detailed specifications throughout the contracts suggests that design instructions were transmitted by subsequent drawing, discussion, or delegation to the mason. For standards of workmanship, contracts appear to have relied on the mason's skills. In both matters, the Burford Masons' experience was advantageous.

An evolution in the contract terms was detected, however, in respect of non-compliance. In view of the brevity of these contracts, this is not surprising. Instead of making the contract more comprehensive and specific, conditions were incorporated to address unsatisfactory work, later with penalties. In the absence of clear and comprehensive contract terms, the effectiveness of these provisions must have been questionable.

The contracting system thrust the mason into a working environment where the written word was unavoidable, in estimates, schedules, and contracts. The mason-contractor was forced into a legal framework, with the risk of litigation in a notoriously dispute-ridden

industry.<sup>117</sup> The sheer numbers of new buildings being constructed in London at this time, the size of debt owed to mason-contractors by their clients, and the lessening control over standards, gave ample opportunity and motivation for going to law to resolve disputes. The only example of Burford Masons being involved in litigation for breach of contract occurred when the Stronges sought to recover arrears for their work at Blenheim Palace, discussed in the next Chapter.<sup>118</sup> During the construction of Marlborough House (Figure 56), the Duchess of Marlborough was minded to take the Stronges to court but, as Sir John Vanbrugh claimed, was dissuaded from litigation by the Duke.<sup>119</sup>

The Burford Masons appear to have executed their contract work without cause for complaint, even overreaching their contract terms. Their proficiency was rewarded with further commissions, as seen in the Catalogue Raisonné.

## **BASIS UPON WHICH BURFORD MASONS WON THEIR CONTRACTS**

It is surprising that, in view of the number of contracts let at this time, the process of finding and selecting the contractor has been little explored. Three strategies have emerged by which the Burford Masons won contracts, which will now be examined: competition, size of workforce, and networking.

### **Competition**

---

<sup>117</sup> Campbell, 'Bricklayers' Contracts', p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Green, pp. 150-152, 260.

<sup>119</sup> *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh*, ed. by Geoffery Webb, 4 vols (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927-1928), IV (1928), p. 188.

The *London Gazette* was used to invite masons' proposals for work at Greenwich Hospital and Queen Anne churches, for instance in 1712 and 1713 respectively, when tenders from masons, carpenters, and bricklayers were invited.<sup>120</sup> However, as contracts for City churches do not appear to have been placed in the *Gazette*, it is likely that a sufficient number of masons presented themselves to the Wren office to take on such work, making advertising unnecessary.

In obtaining their first known London rebuilding contract, Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster were prepared to accept lower prices, for instance, for carving whole Corinthian capitals for seven pounds each at St Stephen Walbrook, compared with eight pounds per three-quarter capital which the London mason Thomas Cartwright charged at St Mary-le-Bow.<sup>121</sup> Strong and Kempster probably viewed underbidding as necessary to obtain this, the first City church contract not to be let to a London mason, also as seed-corn to gain further contracts from the Wren office. This contract, and subsequent ones for City churches, gave Strong and Kempster the opportunity to also sell their stone, which would have served to offset lower rates paid for workmanship.

By the time the main City church campaign came to a close, many masons would have geared up their businesses, ready to use their workforce elsewhere. Opportunities for contracts arising at St Paul's may therefore have been viewed more keenly. It is in this competitive climate that in June 1690, partners Christopher Kempster and Ephraim

---

<sup>120</sup> John Bold, *Greenwich* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 142; *The Commission for Building the Fifty New Churches*, ed. by M.H. Port (London: London Record Society, 1986), p. vxii.

<sup>121</sup> GL, MS 25,539/1 fol. 36; GL, MS 25,539/2 fol. 82<sup>v</sup>.

Beauchamp were awarded the contract at St Paul's previously held by Edward Pierce. Pierce had demanded more money to reflect the difficulties of working at height, and left after complaining that the rates of pay were 'so very low'.<sup>122</sup> Kempster and Beauchamp were prepared to work for those 'low' rates, which may have discouraged others with a large enough workforce from applying. This would be in line with Kempster's and Thomas Strong's approach at St Stephen Walbrook eighteen years earlier.

I have come across only one example of an itemised estimate prepared by a Burford Mason. Discovered among the Kempster papers at The National Archives, it does not appear to have been noticed in the literature and is worthy of closer scrutiny (Figure 57).<sup>123</sup> This estimate, relating to All Hallows the Great, Thames Street (now demolished), is detailed and neatly presented, and may well be typical of the kind of submission masons made to be considered for City church contracts. It appears to be in William Kempster's hand, for erecting a stone lantern on top of the tower, which never came to be built.<sup>124</sup> The estimate is undated, but likely to have been prepared some time after 1683 when William Pritchard, one of the City church commissioners, asked Wren to finish off the tower of All Hallows with a 'Cupolo or Spire'.<sup>125</sup> William's estimate shows the amount of preparatory work necessary for aspiring masons to win contracts. William seems to have made the estimate before having sight of a drawing, as he refers with uncertainty to 'a Moddell or designe', apparently not yet supplied. It is clear, however, that he had been furnished with certain details such as basic dimensions and the number of decorative urns and 'trump arches' (an arch across an angle, such as those supporting

---

<sup>122</sup> WS, xvi (1939), 66; GL, MS 25,622/2.

<sup>123</sup> KvW.

<sup>124</sup> Jeffery, p. 189.

<sup>125</sup> GL, MS 31,684/3.

the dome at St Paul's). Quoting for work without full information contained an element of risk, but was probably deemed necessary by masons in order to enter the competitive arena. As William did not hold a contract in his own name until 1700 at the age of forty-nine, at St Paul's, he may have been prepared to take a risk for All Hallows in order to win a first contract. The estimate may equally have been prepared by William on behalf of his father, who would by then have been well experienced in costing.

The inclusion in the estimate of four trump arches with chains and cramps indicates William's stone lantern to have been intended as a cupola or octagon rising from a square tower. The Wren collection of drawings at All Souls College, Oxford, holds a design for an unidentified octagonal lantern (Figure 58).<sup>126</sup> The lantern as drawn rises to around 40ft in height excluding the parapet below, from a square base measuring 20ft by 20ft.

William's estimate is of similar dimensions, for a lantern '47 ft.high from y<sup>e</sup> top of the Cornice at y<sup>e</sup> foot of the Battlem<sup>t</sup> or Parapett, and 19<sup>f</sup>:10<sup>i</sup> Diam<sup>tr</sup> at Bottom'. However, the drawing does not show any of the sixteen urns or four trump arches which William quoted for. It must be borne in mind, however, that William's estimate was for a design not yet fully prepared, details of which could well have been subsequently altered.

Anthony Geraghty assigns the draughtsmanship of this drawing on stylistic grounds to Hawksmoor in the early 1690s. As the lantern was never built at All Hallows, it is difficult to specify a date for either the estimate or any subsequent drawing. It is possible that the design had a long gestation period, paring down the original concept to this drawing. As Hawksmoor's name first appears among Wren's office staff as early as 1684, both the estimate and drawing may predate the 1690s. The evidence is elusive.

---

<sup>126</sup> Anthony Geraghty, *The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls College, Oxford: A Complete Catalogue* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007), p. 108.

The procedure for letting contracts for Greenwich Hospital, examined by Knoop and Jones, probably illustrates contemporary practice for larger commissions.<sup>127</sup> Proposals setting out prices for specified work were invited in the *London Gazette* and considered by the Commission in charge of the building work. Proposals submitted might then be negotiated downwards, or prices left unspecified for the Commission to determine. Proposals for the foundations of Greenwich Hospital were invited in January 1696.<sup>128</sup> Having submitted theirs to the Commission, the masons Thomas Hill, Edward Strong senior, and John Crooke were summoned on 4 June to explain them, Strong and Hill being awarded a joint contract some nine days later.<sup>129</sup> A similar system of letting contracts operated in respect of the Queen Anne churches.<sup>130</sup>

In 1702, Hawksmoor demonstrated to Greenwich Hospital's Fabric Committee that their craftsmen's wages were much lower than those for other public works in London.<sup>131</sup> This would have limited the competition for contracts, which was evident ten years later, when Edward Strong junior's was the only proposal submitted for masons' work on the north-west corner foundations.<sup>132</sup> It appears that the reputation of the Commission as being payers of low rates, in arrears, had spread, and only those few with the wherewithal to see them through lean times, such as the Stronges, could take on the risk.

---

<sup>127</sup> *London Mason*, p. 56.

<sup>128</sup> *Bold*, p. 108.

<sup>129</sup> *RIBA*, WRE 2/3.

<sup>130</sup> *Yeomans*, p. 11.

<sup>131</sup> *Bold*, p. 119.

<sup>132</sup> TNA, PRO ADM 67/4, fol. 251.



At Blenheim, in letting the first contracts in 1706, Vanbrugh's instructions from the Duke of Marlborough were to avoid paying 'extravagant prices' to the contractors, or, conversely, so little that they were 'ground downe' and spoilt the work.<sup>133</sup> Vanbrugh achieved this by inviting proposals from a large number of craftsmen of the same trade, unknown to each other, in order to arrive at 'moderate' prices, competitive from the client's point of view, which he applied at 'different Rates according to the Performance expected from them'. Vanbrugh acknowledged that the rates agreed, particularly with the masons, 'were considerably less than what was paid, either in the Queen's Works, or others of any Consideration, about Town'. Vanbrugh's claim is substantiated by the Strongs, who in 1707-8 received 2s. 4d. per day per mason at Blenheim, as compared with the three shillings per day William Kempster earned at St Paul's.<sup>134</sup> At the outset therefore, the Strongs accepted their contract to build the main pile at lower rates than they might otherwise have achieved, probably taking the view that the size of the contract, and the possibility of selling their stone, would offset their lower profit margin. Their expectation bore fruit, as discussed in the next chapter.

When building was to resume at Blenheim in 1716, Vanbrugh introduced another form of competition, developing his earlier system. He invited offers for specific jobs, the lowest price for each task being adopted in the new contracts. This ensured the lowest possible prices for the work, which Vanbrugh claimed to be at least ten percent less than the Strongs' tender, a reduction Vanbrugh had not expected to achieve.<sup>135</sup> The Strongs, like other mason-contractors who had previously been working at Blenheim, refused to take new contracts on such terms, presumably not least because it would prejudice their

---

<sup>133</sup> Webb, p. 187.

<sup>134</sup> BL, Add. MSS 19,595, Blenheim Building Accounts, fol. 5; GL, MS 25,473/40 fol. 222.

<sup>135</sup> Webb, p. 65.

negotiating position for future contracts. The continuation of the Strong's section was given instead to the Strong's foreman Christopher Cass. Through examination of Bank of England records I have ascertained that this was almost certainly a subterfuge, as the very day that work began at Blenheim, 19 July 1716, Edward Strong junior opened an account at the Bank of England with a cash deposit of £3650, frequent payments to Cass starting from that date.<sup>136</sup> Vanbrugh wrote the same day that the masons 'are immediately going down to Blenheim to begin their work'.<sup>137</sup> The astute Duchess of Marlborough had suspected as much, and considered Cass's contract 'a trick in proposing Strong's foreman to do the work, because he thought it dangerous to take lower prizes in his own name', but could not prove otherwise. This strategy would demonstrate the Strong's business sense and determination in negotiating terms. As the Strong's were already owed some £12,000 for their earlier work at Blenheim, their keenness to take on another contract in the face of such arrears reflects once more on their financial standing and readiness to expose themselves to risk.

It was of course vital for the prospective mason-contractor to calculate his proposals correctly, as he would otherwise find himself out of pocket. For the contracts for the Queen Anne churches offers were often invited before designs were firmed up, leading to requests from craftsmen for additional payments to reflect unforeseen problems or rising prices.<sup>138</sup> The only instance I have come across of any of the Burford Masons tendering too low was Edward Strong junior with his partner Edward Tufnell for the contract of St Anne Limehouse. In 1715, in response to the frequent complaints about their 'slow proceedings', Strong and Tufnell wrote to the Commissioners saying that in putting

---

<sup>136</sup> BEA, C98/2549, no. 38.

<sup>137</sup> Webb, p. 67.

<sup>138</sup> Yeomans, pp. 6 and 12.

forward their contract price, they 'did not doubt the depth of the water at any crane', which as it turned out only allowed one vessel in five to enter, forcing them to deliver stone at Wapping instead. They therefore petitioned for extra payment for 'double wharfage, crantage, and lightridge'.<sup>139</sup> Whereas this was perhaps unforeseeable, it may well be that Burford Masons did underestimate on other occasions, but were able to absorb the impact without reference to their client.

At Marlborough House, the issue of masons submitting competitive prices is less clear. Before contracts were signed, the Duchess of Marlborough ignored the advice of Christopher Wren junior, who helped supervise his father's project, that the rates she was agreeing with Edward Strong junior and other craftsmen were 'higher than reasonable'.<sup>140</sup> She later complained that the rates were excessive, yet the craftsmen, in their defence, affirmed in writing that their prices were actually lower than usual.<sup>141</sup> Whichever view was correct, for one particular job Edward Strong junior did admit to overcharging, resulting in his bill to the Duchess of Marlborough being reduced accordingly. In 1713 Sir Christopher Wren wrote to the Duchess 'Mr Strong ownes his Error [...] in his Third Bill and has given his hand for the money £46 16. 00. to be deducted from his next account'.<sup>142</sup>

For St Stephen Walbrook, and for protracted major commissions at St Paul's, Greenwich Hospital and Blenheim Palace, the Burford Masons were prepared to accept lower rates

---

<sup>139</sup> LPL, MS 2715, fol. 109.

<sup>140</sup> BL, Add. MSS 61357, CCLVII, fol. 11.

<sup>141</sup> WS, VII (1930), 228.

<sup>142</sup> BL Add. MSS. 61357, CCLVII, fol. 16.

than those paid elsewhere. In most of these contracts, the Burford Masons were able to sell their own stone, a gain which may have overridden the difference in rates.

### **Size of workforce**

Large operations such as the Crown's Office of Works retained many craftsmen as an integrated workforce under the direct labour system. Outside these organisations, most masons' businesses were organised on a relatively small scale, even the most important master masons employing only up to six journeymen and a couple of apprentices in their workshops or yards.<sup>143</sup> The total number of masons and labourers employed by Burford Masons is usually unascertainable from building accounts, but the amount of commissions upon which they worked concurrently, illustrated in the timelines in the *Catalogue Raisonné*, indicates that their workforce must have been considerable. Sporadic evidence exists, however, of the size of their teams at St Paul's, Winchester Palace, and Greenwich Hospital, which show that these projects alone involved a very large workforce.

By the time Thomas Strong was awarded one of the two first masons' contracts for St Paul's in June 1675, he was already providing a considerable workforce, being concurrently engaged on St Stephen Walbrook, and Lord Craven's house at Hamstead Marshall, Berkshire.<sup>144</sup> It is significant that upon Joshua Marshall's death in 1678, when Strong was employing thirty-five men at St Paul's, Marshall's contract had to be split into three upon re-letting, probably because no other mason was prepared to take on such a

---

<sup>143</sup> Lang, p. 82.

<sup>144</sup> SM, Letter-book,

large contract with its financial and employment implications.<sup>145</sup> By 1694, Edward Strong and Christopher Kempster led the largest of the six teams at St Paul's, sixty-five and twenty-five respectively, the next largest teams, those of Samuel Fulkes, and Wise and Hill, each numbering only sixteen.<sup>146</sup> In 1706-8 William Kempster similarly kept a team of sixty-five men working on the south-west tower and the vaults.<sup>147</sup> In terms of the numbers they employed, the Burford Masons ranked among the elite of their craft.

The numbers which Strong and Kempster were required to employ at Winchester Palace between 1683-5 have been noted above. Concurrent with the Winchester contracts, Strong was maintaining his workforce at St Paul's, and at six City churches under construction.<sup>148</sup> Christopher Kempster's organisation was not quite so large at the time, being engaged in London simultaneously on St James Garlickhythe and St Mary Abchurch, and finishing off Tom Tower, Oxford. Examination of building and personal records have revealed that Kempster used family members to supervise in his absence, for instance his brother John at Winchester, his son Christopher at Tom Tower, son William at Abingdon Town Hall, and son-in-law Thomas Hands in Oxford.<sup>149</sup> Although Edward Strong also belonged to a large family of masons, there is little evidence of him using family members for supervision, although it is likely. Working in partnership was another way of ensuring supervision whilst taking on further contracts, and of increasing workforces. The Burford Masons formed at least twenty-six partnerships, the benefits of which will be explored in the next chapter.

---

<sup>145</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, *Masons' Company Court Book*; Lang, p. 113.

<sup>146</sup> GL, MS 5304/1

<sup>147</sup> KvW.

<sup>148</sup> RIBA, WRE/1; KJ, p. 70.

<sup>149</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fol. 236; CCM, Bills 1679-81; ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts; KvW.

In September 1704, Edward Strong was employing twenty-nine men at Greenwich Hospital, in addition to his workforce at St Paul's.<sup>150</sup> Yet only nine months later, the Strong's were able to take on a contract for the main pile at Blenheim Palace.<sup>151</sup> The ability of Edward Strong and Christopher Kempster to muster skilled workforces of large and flexible numbers was no doubt made possible by drawing on the rich reservoir of masons in their home area of Burford. This was an advantage not available to London masons. Some Burford names are detected in the Masons' Company Searches, such as Humphrey Nunney, identified as a 'foreigner' in 1686, likely the same 'nonney' mentioned in Kempster's Daybook in Burford.<sup>152</sup> Another likely Burford name is John Ward, found in Strong's team at St Paul's in 1694, probably from the loyal Ward family working for the Strong's in Taynton, mentioned in Appendix One.<sup>153</sup>

The ability of the Strong's and the Kempsters to marshal such numbers at a time when both were carrying other major contracts for the City churches and at St Paul's, is an indication of the size and versatility of their respective firms, which few other masons could be expected to match. Their success in providing such numbers also indicates that their workforce considered them to be reasonable employers.

## Networking

---

<sup>150</sup> *London Mason*, p. 60.

<sup>151</sup> TNA, SP 34/37/4.

<sup>152</sup> GL, MS 5304/1; BT, Daybook, fol. B7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>153</sup> GL, MS 5304/1.

In an environment where many masons were vying for preference, personal recommendation was highly advantageous, especially where the letting of many expensive contracts was in the hands of relatively few people, Wren in particular. The pre-Fire connection between Wren and the Stronges was traced in the previous chapter, which also noted Wren's familiarity with Kempster and his quarry. This was to become a most valuable association, as Wren came to control the letting of rebuilding and repair contracts for City churches, St Paul's, and Winchester Palace. Wren also had leverage over other commissions awarded to Burford Masons, such as Tom Tower, Oxford, where Wren's persistent recommendation of Kempster led to his engagement, and Greenwich Hospital. In turn, the Stronges' long association with Greenwich Hospital led to other work, for example building, and possibly designing, Addiscombe House, Surrey, for the Treasurer of the Hospital's commission, William Draper (Figure 59).<sup>154</sup>

Recommendation could also come from unexpected quarters. When the Fellows of Trinity College, Oxford, were looking for a mason to build a new chapel in 1691, they interviewed Christopher Kempster on the recommendation of the vicar of Burford, the Reverend John Thorpe, whose elder son John junior was at the time an undergraduate at the College. However, Kempster, having enjoyed London rates of pay for almost twenty-five years by then, tendered almost double the only other offer, from the Oxford mason Bartholomew Peisley. Not only was Kempster not awarded the contract, unsurprisingly, but 'something worse', wrote Thomas Sykes of Trinity, 'he shewd us a letter which he received from the minister of Burford, requiring his coming hither, so that we could not

---

<sup>154</sup> SM, Letter-book.

gett rid of him without a gratuity for his journey'.<sup>155</sup> The Fellows went on to 'clapp up a Bargaine' with Peisley immediately afterwards, before he could learn of Kempster's prices and revise his accordingly. Of the Burford Masons contracting in London, only Christopher Kempster appears to have retained Burford as his home base. His London experience would have given him prestige in his home area, and an enhanced value, but appears to have priced him out of some of the local market.

Family connections could also be a source of recommendation. For the contract to build the east wing of the College of Arms in 1687, Beauchamp's name was proposed by Herald Clarenceux King of Arms (at the time Sir Henry St George), the details of the commission being agreed at the Horn Tavern.<sup>156</sup> It is not known how the Herald may have known of Beauchamp, although he was probably at the time working on nearby St Paul's. Beauchamp assumed the family arms of John Beauchamp of Powick, Worcestershire, as noted in Appendix One. It is possible, therefore, that he was already known to the College through this connection. Family association may also have been responsible for Beauchamp's only City church contract, constructing the tower at St Dunstan-in-the-East, in 1695. Its rebuilding was made possible by the bequest of parishioner William Beauchamp, possibly a relative.<sup>157</sup>

William Kempster seems to have obtained private commissions through his brother-in-law Edward Frances, a master painter-stainer living in Stoke Newington, as William's daybooks record work carried out for both Frances and others in the village.<sup>158</sup> William

---

<sup>155</sup> TCA. Misc. vol. 89/142.

<sup>156</sup> CAA, Chapter Book vol. I, fol. 245.

<sup>157</sup> Author's correspondence with Dr Peter Beauchamp, 2006.

<sup>158</sup> KvW.



also appears to have received commissions through fellow master craftsmen. His daybooks record work for 'Mr Jenings' in 1716 at his houses in Whitefriars and Henley, and for sculpting a monument for him in Henley Church.<sup>159</sup> It is likely that this client was the aforementioned St Paul's master carpenter Richard Jenings, who originated from Henley, and became a wealthy man.<sup>160</sup>

Ephraim Beauchamp and Edward Strong senior and junior all became Hospital governors, a form of philanthropy with which came privileges and authority.<sup>161</sup> Strong was appointed governor of St Bartholomew's Hospital in 1701, when he received his 'greenstaff'.<sup>162</sup> The following year, Edward junior was awarded the commission to design and build the north gate at St Bartholomew's Hospital (Figure 60). His father, as governor, would doubtless have been in a position to influence the choice of mason-contractor. Edward senior himself built the Middle Gate at the Hospital in 1705.<sup>163</sup> Ephraim Beauchamp was a governor of Christ's Hospital, by then a school. In 1716, both he and Edward junior advised on the condition of its cloisters, doubtless stemming from Beauchamp's position as governor.<sup>164</sup>

The Strongs developed social networks in London, potentially helpful in winning business, alerting them to work available, or perhaps recommending them. The emerging Freemasonry movement was one such avenue. The eighteenth-century chronicler of Freemasonry William Preston claimed that Edward Strong senior was appointed Grand

---

<sup>159</sup> KvW.

<sup>160</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 86.

<sup>161</sup> SBHA, SBHB/HB/5/1, fol. 199; epitaph of Ephraim Beauchamp; Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 500.

<sup>162</sup> SBHA, SBHB/HA/1/8, fols. 207-8.

<sup>163</sup> SBHA, SBHB/HB/5/1, fol. 199.

<sup>164</sup> WS, xi (1934), 79.

Warden in 1685 under the 'Grand Master' Wren, and Edward junior in 1695, at the Original Lodge at St Paul's; also that in 1698 both Edward Strongs, senior and junior, were appointed Wardens there.<sup>165</sup> This lodge, which met at the Goose and Gridiron in St Paul's Churchyard, would have attracted master masons active on building projects in the City as 'operative' members, and other, 'speculative' members, mainly gentlemen interested in building but without masonry skills, who might occasionally be looking to employ master craftsmen.<sup>166</sup> Wren's son Christopher noted in *Parentalia* that he laid the last stone on St Paul's lantern together with 'that excellent Artificer Mr. Strong, his Son, and other Free and Accepted masons, chiefly employed in the Execution of the Work'.<sup>167</sup> This statement is ambiguous on several counts: it does not qualify whether the Strongs were 'Free' masons or 'Accepted' masons, or both; neither does it indicate which other mason-contractors were present in that capacity, such as Christopher and William Kempster, or Beauchamp. The classification of 'Accepted' masons is explored in the context of the Masons' Company in Chapter Six. Setting aside the general question of the accuracy of the author, this account indicates that some of St Paul's craftsmen were involved in Freemasonry. The portrait of Edward Strong senior, now in London's Freemasons' Hall, shows him holding a set square and a pair of compasses, symbols of Freemasonry, as well as tools of the mason's trade (Figure 30). The report of his death in 1724 in the *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* described Edward as 'one of the ancientest Masons and FREE-MASONS in England'.<sup>168</sup>

---

<sup>165</sup> *Illustrations of Masonry* (London: Wilkie, 1795), iv.

<sup>166</sup> Conder, pp. 144, 230.

<sup>167</sup> *Parentalia*, p. 293.

<sup>168</sup> *Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer*, 15 February 1724, p. 4.

Edward Strong junior is later recorded in the Freemasons' records of 1725 and 1731 as a member of Lodge no. 25 in Greenwich, meeting at the Swan Tavern in East Street, where the painter Sir James Thornhill was Master in 1725 and the architect John James also a member.<sup>169</sup> It is likely that this lodge was founded earlier by craftsmen working on Greenwich Hospital, and relocated to London in 1736 once work at the Hospital was finished.<sup>170</sup> The extensive work at the Hospital had probably attracted Strong, Thornhill, and James to live in Greenwich, as well as Vanbrugh, who had been involved with the Hospital since 1703 on the Board of Directors.<sup>171</sup> By 1725, Strong had already worked with Thornhill at St Alfege Church, Greenwich, and on the Upper Hall at Greenwich Hospital, and to James's designs also at the Hospital, St George, Hanover Square, and at Canons Park, Middlesex.<sup>172</sup> Another member of the Strong family, John, was noted the same year as a Freemason in the Edgworth (Edgeware) Lodge in London, meeting at the Duke of Chandos Arms.<sup>173</sup> It is likely that this lodge was established in connection with the construction of nearby Canons, the Duke of Chandos's house.

Edward Strong junior's choice of companion on his foreign travels is indicative of the networks he forged, for instance travelling, probably in 1699, to France and Holland with Christopher Wren junior, with whom he was later to work on Marlborough House.<sup>174</sup> When he travelled abroad again in 1711, to the Low Countries, his companions included Sir James Thornhill. Strong and Thornhill were introduced to Prince Eugene of Savoy at his levée in The Hague, having made it known that 'there were English Gentlemen who

---

<sup>169</sup> Library and Museum of Freemasonry, *Quatuor Coronatorum Antigrapha Masonic Reprints*, vol. x.

<sup>170</sup> J. Percy Simpson, 'Some Old Suburban Taverns and Masonry', *AQC*, 21 (1908), 38-56 (p. 40).

<sup>171</sup> Geoffrey Beard, *John Vanbrugh* (London: Batsford, 1986), p. 21.

<sup>172</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>173</sup> *AQC*, 46 (1937), p. 442.

<sup>174</sup> WS XIX (1942), 119.

had a great desire to see him'.<sup>175</sup> Prince Eugene had fought alongside the future Duke of Marlborough at the Battle of Blenheim. Strong had already worked on Blenheim Palace for some six years by the time of his meeting with the prince.

## CONCLUSION

The contracts which the Burford Masons undertook for new build in London were found not to cover the entire construction, leaving much of the finishings and repairs to be carried out by daywork. The fact that tasks paid by day were individually itemised in the accounts makes them appear incidental, apparently supporting Knoop and Jones's conclusion that the contract system displaced direct labour in London. It is evident from closer examination, however, that the Burford Masons' daywork tasks were sometimes substantial and vital to the total construction. This chapter has qualified Knoop and Jones's assumption by showing that significant daywork did continue in London through to the early eighteenth century, which major contractors such as the Burford Masons were able to accommodate alongside their more profitable contractual work.

In the provinces the Burford Masons' contracts appear to have been by great, yet the clients released interim payments despite having no contractual obligation to do so, producing a hybrid arrangement. In London, although the contracts by measure assumed interim payments, they were usually paid far from punctually.

---

<sup>175</sup> BL, Add. MSS. 34,788, Sir John Thornhill's Diary.

Analysis of the Burford Masons' surviving contracts has revealed the client's increasing concern with non-compliance. Provision for resolving disputes emerges as early as 1680, yet sanctions for non-compliance are only detected in 1716, when dismissal was the penalty for unsatisfactory completion of work. No equivalent tightening up in specification was found, however, which would have weakened the client's position in implementing these provisions. Ongoing minimal specification indicates that details were agreed verbally, or given by working drawings; either way, much was still left to trust between client and contractor, necessary when the emerging architect had less knowledge of construction than the master masons they employed. The growing awareness of non-compliance does, however, indicate a weakening of this trust. Such an environment would favour known and experienced contractors like the Burford Masons.

In contrast to this implied lessening in trust, a shift in providing for the resolution of disputes was detected, empowering not only the client to appoint representatives, but the contractor as well. This is the first sign of awareness of the contractor's rights in these contracts. Research into other contemporary and later contracts would be needed to show this to be a growing trend.

Most of the Burford Masons' surviving contracts were for very high-profile and expensive buildings. Edward Strong senior reckoned his family's work, including sale of stone, between 1667 and 1714 to be worth at least £183,344, around fifteen and a half million pounds in today's money, although it is not clear whether this sum is exclusive of outgoings.<sup>176</sup> The opportunities for error were great, yet the Burford Masons appear to

---

<sup>176</sup> SM, Letter-book.

have met their contract terms with such success that they were rewarded by more from the same clients.

The research has revealed that the Strongs particularly profited from the mobility afforded by daywork. The contract system, however, enabled enterprising firms such as the Burford Masons to expand their workforce to a size unimaginable under direct labour, equipping them to take on some of the biggest contracts in the country, many of which opened up opportunities for selling their stone.

Whether contracting by great or by measure, the mason-contractor had to recruit and maintain his workforce, and pay them weekly, whereas he himself often received payment far more intermittently. As a consequence, the mason-contractor bore significant financial risk. The issue of endemic dilatory payments will be explored in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE:**

### **BUSINESS ORGANISATION: FINANCE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The major problem the Burford Masons encountered in London proved to be the practice of dilatory payments. This particular issue demands examination as the Burford Masons completed many major buildings in London despite persistent and serious arrears of payment, yet went on to acquire great wealth. This conundrum prompts investigation of the funding of their business organisation with a view to ascertaining the means of their success under such adverse conditions. This leads to questions of credit, capital and financing as well as to scrutiny of the practical organisation of their businesses.

The chapter starts by looking at a fundamental economic challenge which the Burford Masons faced when going up to London, having to adapt quickly from an essentially agriculture-based economy to an increasingly capital-based one, in which credit played a significant part. Taking on contracts, masons found themselves having to carry serious arrears, which turned them into creditors. In order to appreciate the scale of the problem, the chapter examines six of the Burford Masons' major commissions, selected on the basis of their surviving building records.

Having outlined the problem as it affected the Burford Masons, the question as to how they countered it is addressed. After looking at the level of profit they might expect from their contracts, an exploration follows as to how they raised capital. This necessitates investigation into their interaction with the emerging banking sector and looking into the role of family members providing loans. A further avenue for generating income is explored by looking at their lending and investments.

The chapter goes on to consider other ways by which the Burford Masons dealt with the effects of dilatory payments. Five strategies emerge which throw light on how they achieved this: the importance of quarry owning setting them apart from their London-based competitors; the role of the family firm; the formation of partnerships, both between themselves, and with outsiders; the diversification of clients; and diversification of trade.

The literature has identified the issue of late payments in two different ways. Firstly, Knoop and Jones considered it as one aspect of research into masons working in London after the Great Fire in their *London Mason*. In looking at the pattern of mason-contractors' payments in respect of several projects, they recognised, possibly for the first time, that 'heavy indebtedness to mason-contractors appears to have been the rule rather than the exception'.<sup>1</sup> They did not develop this general statement to quantify the level of debt which individual masons carried, and their exploration of masons' funding remained inconclusive. My research goes beyond Knoop and Jones by scrutinising the problem in depth from the experience of one particular group of masons, extending the geographical area, timescale, and range of building types.

---

<sup>1</sup> *London Mason*, p. 50.



Knoop and Jones found little in the way of masons' own accounts and wage books to shed light on their business affairs.<sup>2</sup> More sources relating to the Burford Masons have since become accessible. They could not have seen, for instance, Kempster's Daybook, Edward Strong junior's copy-book letters, and the Strong Memorandums in manuscript, all of which have since come into the public domain. Neither do Knoop and Jones appear to have looked at William Kempster's daybooks and papers held as Chancery records.<sup>3</sup> These sources reveal, among other things, details of the shipment of stone, the importance of the family firm, diversification of clients and trade, such as their farming interests and business in malt, all of which are relevant factors explored below and have proved fertile ground for research. Since Knoop and Jones, these sources appear to have remained untapped. By focusing on just three dynasties, and benefiting from these sources, this chapter builds up a more detailed, specific picture, and goes a long way to explain how the Burford Masons were able to absorb late payments.

The second approach to this issue has been by reference to one major client. Howard Colvin looked at late payments in respect of the Crown's Office of Works, and in so doing acknowledged that its funding problems had a deleterious effect on the employed craftsmen, unless they had recourse to extensive capital.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Burford Masons did work for the Crown at Winchester Palace, it was only one of their many clients. My study of the Burford Masons' experience looks at the problem from a wider and more diverse client base than Colvin's.

---

<sup>2</sup> *London Mason*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> KvW.

<sup>4</sup> *HKW*, p. 44.

Also restricting his examination to a single employer, James W.P Campbell explored the issue in the context of the mason-contracting firms at St Paul's Cathedral, concluding, on the basis of many assumptions, that they could make profits of up to 40%.<sup>5</sup> Addressing the question of profit, my investigation draws on William Kempster's daybooks recording his workforce and expenditure at St Paul's, as well as scrutinising the building accounts. It encompasses a number of other major commissions, widening the basis of investigation into how the Burford Masons coped with the problem.

In the light of the sparse literature, this chapter particularly relies on primary sources including records kept by the Burford Masons, affording first-hand insight and evidence of their *modus operandi*. However, the content of all these sources is fragmentary, and often lacks detail, for instance, regarding the size of their workforce carrying out quarrying operations and its financial implications. The archives of the Bank of England and Hoare's Bank have been found to provide evidence of the Burford Masons' investments and movements of money. Although the recipients of outgoing payments are usually named in these accounts, the sources of incoming payments, probably from clients, are seldom identifiable, being paid in cash, 'by note' or from another bank. Legal documents discovered at the British Library, Bodleian Library, National Archives, London Metropolitan and county record offices, and at the Burford Tolsey Museum, relating to loans, mortgages and payments, have all served in various ways to illustrate the Burford Masons' use of money. Building accounts have been examined to assess the issue of payments. This wide range of sources represents the best evidence for exploring the problem of late payments and how the Burford Masons countered it.

---

<sup>5</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 303.

## GENERAL FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL BACKGROUND

It is apparent from the building accounts for St John's and Trinity Colleges, Oxford, and the contract for Lower Slaughter Manor, Gloucestershire (Figure 46), that the Strongs were paid for their work on these larger projects in ready money.<sup>6</sup> However, the local economy in which the Burford Masons operated before they ventured up to London also recognised barter and trade tokens as accepted forms of payment. To assist the transactions of everyday life at a time of insufficient coinage, trade tokens issued by local businessmen such as innkeepers, waggoners, and clothiers were widely used as a substitute (Figure 61).<sup>7</sup> Innkeepers and wealthy widows were the local providers of money lending services.<sup>8</sup>

Payment by barter continued to be used even for relatively substantial services until later in the century. Kempster's Daybook shows barter being used for building work carried out on the tailor William Kinge's house in Burford in 1677, in return for which Kinge made Kempster 'a pair of drawers a vest and a pair of breeches a coat and awastcot', and gowns, petticoats, waistcoats and undercoats for his wife and five of his daughters.<sup>9</sup>

Emerging from this background, the Burford Masons found themselves in London in a very different environment. London was undergoing what Peter Dickson termed a 'Financial

---

<sup>6</sup> SJCA, MUN LXXXI.2; TCA, III E/I; GA, D45/E17.

<sup>7</sup> R.H. Gretton, *The Burford Records: A Study in Minor Town Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), p. 221.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond Moody, *The Inns of Burford* (Burford: Hindsight, 2007), p. 16; Tom Arkell, 'Interpreting Probate Inventories' in *When Death Do us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, ed. by Tom Arkell, Nesta Evans and Nigel Goose, (Oxford: Leopard's Head, 2000), p. 318.

<sup>9</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. B11<sup>v</sup>.

Revolution'.<sup>10</sup> Spare cash, which prior to the Civil War had been deposited with scriveners, was increasingly placed with goldsmiths, some of whom paid interest, issued notes and made short-term advances.<sup>11</sup> Many of these goldsmiths went on to form private banks; between 1670 and 1700 there were ninety-three goldsmith bankers in London, and probably an equal number of scriveners.<sup>12</sup> In 1690 the major property developer Nicholas Barbon was complaining about the proliferation of goldsmiths in the absence of a public bank, although due to the size of his operation his view may be atypical.<sup>13</sup> The founding of the Bank of England four years later with public and private money, creating the first institutional bank in the country, must have gone some way to address this need.<sup>14</sup> Credit was not only available from banks, however, but from merchants and individuals, as probate accounts show. In response to the need to rebuild the City, credit was increasingly raised against the security of property as mortgages.<sup>15</sup> The provision of credit had become a form of money-making in itself, and carrying debt, therefore, an accepted condition.

New also was the use of public funding to rebuild fifty-one City churches, St Paul's Cathedral, and the infrastructure of London, from a levy on coal entering the Port of London, introduced by the Rebuilding Acts of 1667 and 1670. Revenue from this Coal Tax was not as reliable as anticipated, being subject not only to seasonal variations but interruption of coal deliveries by blockades at sea during times of war.<sup>16</sup> Funding from this source proved

---

<sup>10</sup> P.G.M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit 1688-1756* (London: Macmillan, 1967), passim.

<sup>11</sup> John Orbell and Alison Turton, *British Banking* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> *Money - A History*, ed. by Jonathan Williams (London: British Museum Press, 1997), p. 177.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel M. Abramson, *Building the Bank of England: Money, Architecture, Society* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> Muldrew, pp. 115-6.

<sup>16</sup> Jane Lang, *Rebuilding of St Paul's after the Great Fire of London* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 53.

inadequate from the start, not least due to the need to reimburse the cost of the large backlog of reconstruction work on City churches predating its introduction.<sup>17</sup> Collection and administration of the levy was found to be open to negligence or even abuse, which became apparent in 1690, when Wren inspected the accounts for himself.<sup>18</sup> The construction of St Paul's was additionally funded by donations, which made up half of the total funding at first, but tailed off dramatically after 1688, by which time benefactors could deposit money as interest-bearing loans instead. This factor had a disproportionate impact, as the construction costs of St Paul's increased as the building progressed. The unreliable Coal Tax was used later to fund construction of the Queen Anne churches.<sup>19</sup>

In the case of royal building projects which were similarly dependent upon credit, resources were often prioritised towards financing warfare against the Dutch and the French, resulting in Crown construction also being irregularly funded.<sup>20</sup> The effect of diverting funds from construction to warfare had especial bearing on Greenwich Hospital, which was intended to be financed by modest royal instalments of two thousand pounds a year, together with a subscription of sixpence a month from seamen's wages, amounting to £10,000 a year. However, the king's payments were very soon in arrears, and revenue from seamen's wages dwindled during the War of Spanish Succession (1702-1713).<sup>21</sup> Although in the early eighteenth century it was generally accepted that construction work for the Crown was rewarded by the highest rates of pay, this was not the case at Greenwich

---

<sup>17</sup> Paul Jeffery, *The City Churches of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: Hambledon, 1996), p. 48.

<sup>18</sup> James W.P. Campbell, *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), pp. 66, 64.

<sup>19</sup> Howard Colvin, 'Fifty New Churches', *Architectural Review*, 107, (March 1950), 189-196 (p. 189).

<sup>20</sup> *HKW*, pp. 39-46.

<sup>21</sup> John Bold, *Greenwich* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), pp. 134, 97.

Hospital, where Hawksmoor reported to the Hospital's Commission that the rates he had agreed were in fact much lower than those for other public works in London.<sup>22</sup>

## **THE BURFORD MASONS' EXPERIENCE WITH DILATORY PAYMENTS**

On the whole, construction work continued even if the client was aware that funds might not be available immediately to pay for it. The indebted mason-contractor who worked on, as the Burford Masons usually did, still had to pay his men, so late payments effectively transferred the problem of financing on to him. The fact that Burford Masons took contracts for a great number of projects which turned out to be seriously inadequately funded meant that they bore a cumulative financial burden for many years (Figure 62). As an indication of the extent of the arrears the Burford Masons carried, six of their major projects are now examined: City churches, St Paul's Cathedral, Winchester Palace, Greenwich Hospital, Blenheim Palace, and Queen Anne churches.

### **City churches**

The first City church any of the Burford Masons rebuilt, St Stephen Walbrook, also proved to be their first recorded encounter with dilatory payments.<sup>23</sup> As the rebuilding of this church is comparatively well documented, it lends itself for special investigation to shed light on their operation with City churches.

---

<sup>22</sup> *HKW*, p. 46; *Bold*, p. 119.

<sup>23</sup> *GL*, MS 25,539.

Its foundation stone was laid in December 1672, and by the time the first measurement took place in September 1674, Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster had built up to the abacus height of the capitals, work valued at £1805 18s. 9d.<sup>24</sup> It can be seen from the building accounts (Figure 63) that this sum, as with the other payments due to them under this contract totalling £4423 18s. 2d., was not paid in full until 13 July 1682, almost ten years after they commenced work.<sup>25</sup> By this time Thomas Strong had died, his work carried on by his brother Edward, to whom Thomas had 'left all his Employment'.<sup>26</sup> In order to secure payment of Thomas's arrears, Edward signed a declaration with Kempster on 7 July 1681, confirming them as 'Partners for the receipt of the rest due of the money due and remaining in S<sup>r</sup> Christopher Wren's bookes for the Workes aforesaid'.<sup>27</sup>

St Stephen Walbrook is an extreme case of masons bearing dilatory payments for several reasons. As noted in Chapter Three, this church was built 'on the extraordinary', its construction approved by the Commission but not yet funded by it. Rebuilding in the meantime was financed by the parish vestry, the rate of progress initially governed by the parish's own resources. As a result, churches built on the extraordinary often took longer to construct than those built 'on the ordinary', which were financed by the Commission with the help of a small initial loan from respective parish vestries.<sup>28</sup> The analysis in Figure 64 shows that the first twelve churches to be rebuilt and financed on the ordinary took on average less than five years to complete, whereas St Stephen Walbrook and St James Garlickhythe both took almost ten years on the extraordinary.

---

<sup>24</sup> GL, MS 594/2, fol. 127; GL, MS 25539/1, fol. 2.

<sup>25</sup> GL, MSS 25,539/1 and 25,550, fol. 15.

<sup>26</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>27</sup> GL, MS 25,544/7, Imprest Book.

<sup>28</sup> Jeffery, p. 47.

By the time Strong and Kempster took the contract for St Stephen Walbrook, they would have been aware that there was already a backlog in payments to other mason-contractors building on the ordinary, and so would have expected their own payments to be even more dilatory.<sup>29</sup> It is unlikely, however, that they could have envisaged the length of time they would have to carry the debt.

The distinction between building on the ordinary and the extraordinary lasted until around 1680, by which time Strong and Kempster had taken a total of three contracts for City churches, all on the extraordinary, the others being St James Garlickythe and St Benet Paul's Wharf.<sup>30</sup> By the 1680s, funding was sufficient for the Commission to agree to pay for interior fittings as well as the fabric of churches in respect of poor parishes such as St Mary Somerset, yet even here, Kempster was only fully paid in December 1694 for the work he started on that church some eight years earlier.<sup>31</sup> Examination of building accounts for other City churches shows that full payment for masons' work was generally made upon completion, and as masons' work was the earliest to be embarked upon, and usually the most costly, the mason-contractor was required to shoulder a larger burden of arrears than other craftsmen, over a longer period.

The entire burden of arrears was not necessarily carried until completion, however, as small 'imprests' were released to the more important craftsmen so that work did not come to a standstill.<sup>32</sup> Imprests were a claim on future revenue which the contractor could convert into cash only by holding them until the client paid them off in full, or by selling them on

---

<sup>29</sup> Jeffery, p. 48.

<sup>30</sup> GL, MS 25,542/2, fols. 85, 99.

<sup>31</sup> GL, MS 25,533/4.

<sup>32</sup> Jeffery, p. 33; WS, VI (1929), 75.



earlier at a discounted rate.<sup>33</sup> The fact that they were released means they must have been of some help to the contractor, although the extent to which they offset his arrears is difficult to ascertain owing to discrepancies in the Commission's imprest records, some appearing to be duplicated. Using evidence in the 'Abstract of Imprests' and 'Payments to Craftsmen' ledgers, which appear more reliable than the 'Imprest Books', an attempt has been made to show the shortfall between the measured value of Strong and Kempster's work at St Stephen Walbrook and the face value of the imprests they received (Figure 65).<sup>34</sup> The shortfall represents the minimum arrears they had to carry, the average found to be £577 per annum, although in 1679 it rose to £1240.

As the Burford Masons took on a total of thirty-two contracts in respect of twenty-three City churches (Figure 40), the debt they shouldered in building City churches was substantial, particularly in the running of their earlier contracts.

### **St Paul's Cathedral**

Three main studies touching on funding the rebuilding of St Paul's have been published in recent years. The first, *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London 604-2004*, looked at difficulties of financing the rebuilding mainly from the Cathedral's point of view.<sup>35</sup> In *Building St Paul's*, Campbell notes that payments to St Paul's craftsmen were often delayed, exploring the issue in respect of the mason-contractors in his paper 'Building a Fortune'. None of these studies, however, consider how masons might have withstood these

---

<sup>33</sup> *London Mason*, pp. 53-54.

<sup>34</sup> GL, MSS 25,546, 25,491, 25,544/3 and 4.

<sup>35</sup> *St Paul's: The Cathedral Church of London 604-2004*, ed. by Derek Keene, R. Arthur Burns, and Andrew Saint (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

delays, other than Campbell's assumption of large profit margins on contract prices, discussed below.

The Burford Masons kept by far the largest teams working at St Paul's in 1694.<sup>36</sup> All members needed to be paid regularly, whether or not the Commission paid the mason-contractor. As with the City churches, a system of imprests operated at St Paul's, leaving the mason-contractor to bear the arrears in the meantime. Only two and a half years after starting work on St Paul's in 1675, Thomas Strong was left with a shortfall of £811 0s.11<sup>3/4d.</sup> after receipt of imprests to the value of £1000, whilst by September 1686 the debt owed to his successor in title Edward Strong had grown to £2564 0s.6<sup>1/2d.</sup>, having received imprests worth £600.<sup>37</sup> Despite these arrears, Strong kept his workforce on at St Paul's. It would be in full knowledge of this insecure financial environment that Kempster and Beauchamp took over Pierce's contract in 1690.

In the absence of adequate funding, an Act of Parliament was passed in 1685 to facilitate loans to be deposited, enabling work to continue at St Paul's.<sup>38</sup> Interest was paid at six percent, reduced to five percent in 1700, although even that was not paid regularly. Despite the arrears they carried, Edward Strong, Christopher Kempster, and Ephraim Beauchamp were among those who in 1694 deposited £480 each.<sup>39</sup> In 1697, Wren reported to the Commissioners overseeing the rebuilding of St Paul's that the contractors' arrears were overdue to an extent that, if nothing were done, work might cease altogether,

---

<sup>36</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, London Masons' Company Court Book.

<sup>37</sup> *London Mason*, p. 50.

<sup>38</sup> 1<sup>o</sup> Jacobi 2<sup>di</sup>, An Act for rebuilding ffinishing and Adorning of the Cathedral Church of St Paul's London.

<sup>39</sup> GL, MS 25,473/30.

recommending that their arrears be converted into interest-bearing loans.<sup>40</sup> Much of the craftsmen's arrears thereby became bridging loans, albeit involuntarily granted. Edward Strong let lie £3800 of his arrears, Kempster and Beauchamp together let lie £1650.<sup>41</sup> These sums were not fully repaid, with interest, until some fifteen years later.<sup>42</sup>

Examination of papers at the Bodleian Library has revealed that Edward Strong senior's son-in-law, Robert New, deposited a further £3100 between 1701 and 1705, 'for the only use and behoofe of Edward Strong' at St Paul's, thereby supporting Strong's continuing employment financially.<sup>43</sup> There is no indication as to whether this money was New's own, or Strong's under New's name. It is clear that Strong, Kempster and Beauchamp all valued their St Paul's contracts highly, lending money to the project even in the face of large arrears. One major reason would have been anticipation of selling their stone.

Analysis of the daybook which William Kempster kept when he took over the contract for the south-west tower in 1700 has exposed the Commission making no payments to him for the first fourteen months of his contract period. It is apparent from William's accounts that his father Christopher forwarded him the money weekly over the period to pay his team of up to twenty-five men. Only on 29 December 1701 is there evidence of William at last being paid by the Commissioners instead of by his father, recording 'then recd of Mr Spencer one my owne Account £14-0-0' (Figure 66).<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Spencer was Clerk of Works to the Commission.<sup>45</sup> This loan appears never to have been repaid, his father

---

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 128; Lang, p. 179.

<sup>41</sup> GL, MS 25,481/4.

<sup>42</sup> GL, MS 25,481/4 & 5.

<sup>43</sup> Strong family accounts: Bodl., MS Top. Herts. c.2.

<sup>44</sup> KvW.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, *Building St Paul's*, p. 44.

waiving the debt of three hundred and fifty pounds plus interest in his will, made eleven years later.<sup>46</sup>

Due to limited evidence in the building accounts, a breakdown of arrears incurred is not possible. It is possible, however, to indicate the potential for arrears by looking at the total value of the Burford Masons' work at St Paul's, which was assessed by the Wren Society as £9019 for William Kempster, and £15,132 for Kempster and Beauchamp. Edward Strong estimated the value of his and Thomas's work at St Paul's to be £54,623, with a further £21,920 for their stone.<sup>47</sup> The potential was indeed very great.

### **Winchester Palace**

In 1683 Christopher Kempster and Edward Strong were among the five mason-contractors engaged to carry out the masonry work on Charles II's new palace at Winchester, Kempster on the west wing, Strong on the east. Both appear to have been less encumbered by arrears at Winchester than for other projects considered here, but the example shows that the Crown also confronted them with dilatory payments. For their contracts above ground, Kempster and Strong received advances of fifty and sixty pounds respectively before work began, roughly the equivalent of one month's pay, the remaining nine-tenths to be paid monthly. Despite clauses in their contracts to lessen their workforces if payment fell behind, neither activated these provisions as the names of Kempster and Strong are found among the thirteen craftsmen still owed £4250 when laid off at the King's death in 1685.<sup>48</sup>

After succeeding in their petition three years later to take and sell the timber left on site as

---

<sup>46</sup> KvW.

<sup>47</sup> WS xv (1938), p. xiv; SM, Letter-book.

<sup>48</sup> RIBA, WRE 1/2, Wren Family Papers.

part payment, the indebted craftsmen were still left with £2987 owed between them.<sup>49</sup> It is not known what proportion of that sum was owed to Strong and to Kempster. As the stone at Winchester had been supplied by the Crown and not by the mason-contractors, money owing to the Burford Masons was in respect of workmanship only, representing real outgoings.<sup>50</sup> The Paymaster's accounts for Winchester Palace were not finally declared until 1709.<sup>51</sup> However, inspection has shown them not to break down the individual amounts owed.

### **Greenwich Hospital**

Just sixteen months after the first masons' contract for Greenwich Hospital was let to partners Edward Strong and Thomas Hill in June 1696, the Hospital's Fabric Committee reported that 'considerable sums of money are due to some of the chief workmen [...] for want whereof the said workmen cannot proceed with their work'.<sup>52</sup> On this occasion, 'tallies', a form of credit advance similar to imprests but issued by the Exchequer, were allocated to Strong.<sup>53</sup> Tallies were commonly used at this time to finance government expenditure.<sup>54</sup> By 1700 Edward Strong was already owed £1680.<sup>55</sup> Unlike the situation at St Paul's, where in the face of large arrears Strong did continue to pay his team, at Greenwich his men were not paid and went on strike. Being a major contractor, withdrawal of labour proved effective, as the Commission overseeing the Hospital's construction found £500 to enable work to continue. There is no indication as to whether Strong was seeking

---

<sup>49</sup> WS XVIII (1941), 74.

<sup>50</sup> RIBA, WRE 1/2.

<sup>51</sup> *HKW*, p. 308.

<sup>52</sup> *London Mason*, p. 53.

<sup>53</sup> WS VI (1929), 35.

<sup>54</sup> E.L. Hargreaves, *The National Debt* (London: Arnold, 1930), p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Bold*, p. 119.

to force the Commission's hand. Knoop and Jones compared names in Strong's team at St Paul's as noted in the Masons' Company search of 1694, with those of his men on day rates at Greenwich Hospital in 1699, and suggest that, work at St Paul's being ongoing, there might have been some overlapping of workforce.<sup>56</sup> This would have given the Strong's more flexibility in the use of their workforce.

As noted in the previous chapter, by the time proposals were invited in 1712 for masons' work on the north-west corner of Greenwich Hospital, Edward Strong junior's tender was the only one submitted, indicating that other potential contractors found the likely burden of debt unacceptable.<sup>57</sup> By 1720, Strong was still owed £8461 1s. 6d. for work carried out in 1715-16, equating to nearly three quarters' of a million pounds in today's money.<sup>58</sup> Research has not revealed when this debt was paid.

### **Blenheim Palace**

Blenheim Palace was to be Queen Anne's gift from a grateful nation for the Duke of Marlborough's victory at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704. The Queen's commitment to pay for the construction of Blenheim Palace was never recorded however, and the contracts to Sir John Vanbrugh and the craftsmen made no mention of the Crown.<sup>59</sup> The Edward Strong's, father and son, took the contract to build the main pile in May 1706. Royal funding was withdrawn, however, after the Duchess of Marlborough's falling-out with the

---

<sup>56</sup> GL, MS 5304/1; *London Mason*, pp. 56, 89-91.

<sup>57</sup> WS, VI (1929), 66.

<sup>58</sup> *London Mason*, p. 51.

<sup>59</sup> VCH, *Oxfordshire XII* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 448.

Queen in 1710, by which time the Stronges had constructed to roof level.<sup>60</sup> Despite provision in their contract for them to stop work if arrears exceeded five hundred pounds, the Stronges worked on until summer 1712 when their arrears had accumulated to over eleven thousand pounds.<sup>61</sup>

It was not until 1718 that the Stronges filed an action for arrears of payment for work up to 1712 in the Court of Exchequer against the Duke of Marlborough, and against Vanbrugh and His Majesty's Attorney-General in case it should miscarry, in the sum of £12,229 13s.2d., which included interest.<sup>62</sup> Around a third of the principal claimed was for supply of their own stone.<sup>63</sup> Although the Stronges had been dissuaded from petitioning the Duke earlier by Vanbrugh, their hesitancy may also have stemmed from doubts about the legal status of their bills, as the Blenheim lawsuits reveal an unnamed witness stating 'Mr Strong has not proved in the legal Way any of his Debts', owing to signatories to the Stronges' bills being unauthorised.<sup>64</sup> Certainly the Duke of Marlborough later claimed, albeit unsuccessfully, that the Stronges' bills were not signed by a 'proper officer'.<sup>65</sup>

In 1721, on appeal to the House of Lords, the Stronges' award was adjusted to £9044 17s.5d., which excluded the element of interest.<sup>66</sup> The Duchess instigated two further, unsuccessful, appeals, which were still not totally resolved even after Edward senior's death, as a document in the Bodleian Library has disclosed that his executor and son-in-law

---

<sup>60</sup> David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (London: Country Life, 1951), p. 119.

<sup>61</sup> BL, 19 h.1 (193), fol. 354, Court of Appeal records.

<sup>62</sup> Green, p. 150.

<sup>63</sup> Green, p. 128.

<sup>64</sup> Green, pp. 128, 46; Bodl., North, b.22.

<sup>65</sup> BL, 19. h.2 (58), Appeals to the House of Lords.

<sup>66</sup> BL, 19.h.2 (58).

Robert New felt it necessary in November 1725 to keep back £454 14s. 1d. 'till the costs in the said Cause are Taxed and finally adjusted'.<sup>67</sup>

### Queen Anne churches

St Alfege in Greenwich was the first of the Queen Anne churches to be completed by partners Edward Strong junior and Edward Tufnell.<sup>68</sup> In 1713, the same year as they took their contract, payments for their work had already fallen heavily in arrears, which Strong and Tufnell were finding difficult to bear. They petitioned the Commissioners overseeing the programme, stating that nearly three thousand pounds' arrears were due to them and 'there being severall ships arrived and loaded for the Churches of Deptford and Westminster [...] make application for a further £2000 to enable us to answer the demands arising from so great a dispatch'.<sup>69</sup> Not only were the partners also engaged on St Paul, Deptford and St John, Smith Square at the time, but Strong was additionally working on the dilatory-paying Greenwich Hospital, with the large Blenheim debt still unresolved.

Between 1713 and 1730, Edward junior was involved in constructing eight of the twelve Queen Anne churches built, and four associated minister's houses. Construction of Queen Anne churches was almost brought to a standstill through shortage of funds between 1719 and 1722.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in 1719, Edward junior claimed that without payment, he could not

---

<sup>67</sup> Bodl., MS Top.Herts.c.2.

<sup>68</sup> LPL, MS 2703.

<sup>69</sup> LPL, MS 2728, fol. 42.

<sup>70</sup> *The Commissions for Building the Fifty New Churches*, ed. by M.H. Port (London: London Record Society, 1986), p. xxxi.



continue on the tower of St Michael Cornhill, which was being financed by the same fund.<sup>71</sup> Not until 1726 were the Commission's finances on a sound footing again.

### **Summary: Length of burden of arrears**

The above examples of the Burford Masons' experience in very high-profile and costly projects which turned out to be particularly unreliably remunerated gives some idea of the extent to which their clients were indebted to these masons. From the start of Strong and Kempster's contract in 1672, arrears of payment started to accrue. The problem of arrears persisted over the next fifty years, culminating in the case of Blenheim Palace in the Strong's going to law to recover the equivalent of almost a million pounds in today's money.<sup>72</sup> The Burford Masons ran many of these unreliably-paid contracts concurrently, which compounded the burden of arrears. Only in the case of St Paul's was interest paid on at least part of the arrears.

It is surprising that the Burford Masons, coming from a rural economy, were able to adapt to being kept waiting for payment for years on end. Even more remarkable is the fact that, having experienced extremely tardy payments, they were prepared to undertake many other contracts likely to present similar problems. Evidence has been found of only three instances of Burford Masons finding these arrears difficult to bear. The strike mentioned above at Greenwich Hospital in 1700 coincided with serious arrears at St Paul's Cathedral. Strong and Tufnell's petition when working on St Alfege in 1713 was possibly a reflection of the large debts owed to the Strong's at that time in respect of Blenheim Palace. Strong's

---

<sup>71</sup> WS, XIX (1942), 47.

<sup>72</sup> BL, 19.h.1 (193), fol. 354, Court of Appeal records.

problem in 1719 at St Michael Cornhill coincided with the death of his partner Tufnell, no doubt leaving Strong exposed on other uncompleted commissions they had undertaken together.

The magnitude of arrears owed to the Burford Masons over long periods of time begs the question of how in practical terms they sustained these burdens. The first aspect to be investigated is that of profit.

### **THE BURFORD MASONS AS CONTRACTORS: PROFIT**

At a time when artisans, shopkeepers and tradesmen in England were earning on average ten pounds a year, noted by Gregory King for the year 1688, jobbing master masons on London rates might earn around thirty-five pounds a year, equivalent to the income of a 'gentleman'.<sup>73</sup> It might be expected that masons acting as contractors received substantially higher remuneration from their late-paying contracts in recognition of having to finance the period of arrears. Yet it was seen in the previous chapter that Kempster and Beauchamp were prepared to take on Edward Pierce's surrendered contract at St Paul's on the 'low rates' which Pierce had refused.<sup>74</sup> Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh claimed that the rates paid at Greenwich Hospital and Blenheim Palace were lower than for other public works. These examples of the Burford Masons' contracts do not indicate exceptionally high profit margins.

---

<sup>73</sup> Julian Hoppit, *A Land of Liberty? England 1689-1727* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 52-3.

<sup>74</sup> WS, XVI (1939), 66; GL, MS 25,622/2.

There is some evidence as to the level of profit which masons charged around this time. In London, after six years' experience as a mason-contractor, Thomas Strong's estimate for constructing brick arches for St Stephen Walbrook Vestry notes 10% on top of outgoings 'ffor my Proffitt'.<sup>75</sup> In Oxford, William Townesend worked by day rates in 1719 on the quadrangle at The Queen's College for a 15% profit, and by great on the Robinson Building at Oriel College for over 20%.<sup>76</sup> However, he may have been following the firm's practice, William's father John being known as 'Old Pincher, from his pinching the Workmen', paying them less than he charged out for them, the difference representing profit.<sup>77</sup> As this was then common practice, his soubriquet indicates that his profit was considered unusually high.<sup>78</sup> The successful provincial mason Francis Smith of Warwick, for his work at Ditchley Park, Oxfordshire (1720-22), added only 5% to his outgoings 'for my trouble, journeys, and profit out of my workmen'.<sup>79</sup> Smith had a reputation for honesty.<sup>80</sup> In the light of these examples, Strong's 10% in London would not appear out of line.

One attempt has been made in the literature to establish the level of profit which mason-contractors made at St Paul's Cathedral, by Campbell, and deserves closer examination. It was mentioned earlier that in his paper 'Building a Fortune', Campbell concluded that 'about 40% profit was not unreasonable' for mason-contractors at St Paul's, but acknowledged it to be 'a very rough calculation with a large number of assumptions made'.<sup>81</sup> His starting-point was the Masons' Company Search, which found Strong

---

<sup>75</sup> GL, MS 1056 Collected Papers.

<sup>76</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', pp. 54-55.

<sup>77</sup> *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne*, ed. by C.E. Doble, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885-1921), 48 (1906), 171.

<sup>78</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', p. 55.

<sup>79</sup> *London Mason*, p. 62.

<sup>80</sup> Andor Gomme, *Smith of Warwick* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000), p. 52.

<sup>81</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 303.

employing sixty-five men at St Paul's on 26 September 1694. For the purposes of calculation, Campbell assumed the same number found on that one day to have been consistently employed over the June-September quarter. This overlooks the likelihood that Strong shifted his men on to concurrent contracts during that summer building period, for instance to nearby St Benet Paul's Wharf vestry, or Morden College at Blackheath. Other assumptions include the number of working days for that quarter to be sixty-six, despite Campbell's analysis of St Paul's building accounts in a previous paper averaging seventy working days.<sup>82</sup>

Campbell also assumed that Strong paid each member of the team two shillings per day.<sup>83</sup> Ten months earlier at St Paul's, the Commission paid Kempster and Beauchamp 2s. 6d. per day for masons' work additional to their contract; paying masons in their team two shillings a day would have made a twenty percent profit.<sup>84</sup> Strong's team included sixteen apprentices bound to other master masons who Strong would have compensated, but at low rates. A further four employees were journeymen, again attracting less than full rates. Campbell quotes a figure of £690 as Strong's payments from the Commission for the quarter, citing the Wren Society as a source. Analysis of St Paul's building accounts, however, produces a total 13% higher than the Wren Society's figure, excluding payments for stone.<sup>85</sup> It is difficult to assess to what extent these variables might affect the final outcome, although it is likely that workforce numbers, which remain unknown over the period, would be a significant factor.

---

<sup>82</sup> 'The Carpentry Trade in Seventeenth-Century England', *Georgian Group Journal*, 12 (2002), 215-237 (p. 227).

<sup>83</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 303.

<sup>84</sup> GL, MS 25,473/29, fol. 20.

<sup>85</sup> GL, MS 25,473/29, fols. 96-134.

By contrast, William Kempster's daybooks record the number of men employed per week on the St Paul's vaults in August 1709, broken down into half-days, with each employee's name, rate of pay per day, cumulative pay for the week, and the amount William paid out for his workforce each week (Figure 67).<sup>86</sup> I have compared St Paul's building accounts with this evidence, also for the year 1705, with a view to ascertaining William's profit as a mason-contractor.<sup>87</sup> The results ranged from a profit of 105% to a loss of almost 40%, showing this to be a highly unreliable approach, likely due to the building accounts including payment for work brought forward from previous periods, not itemised. I have been able to ascertain, however, that William made a constant 11% profit on taskwork at St Paul's paid by day outside his contract, both in respect of master masons and labourers. He made a smaller profit, around 6%, from his carvers, whose work was more expensive. Contract work could be expected to be rewarded more highly, carrying a greater financial risk.

Campbell's expectation of 'great profits' for mason-contractors seems to stem from his conclusion in an earlier paper that the St Paul's master carpenter Richard Jenings made a profit of between 20-40%.<sup>88</sup> That figure too was calculated without evidence of the number of men which Jenings employed. Jenings was paid by day, which he claimed in 1710 was less well remunerated than being paid by contract.<sup>89</sup> Campbell assumed that the percentage profit enjoyed by masons holding contracts would have been greater. In the absence of further information, Campbell's claim that St Paul's mason-contractors enjoyed a 40% profit margin in recognition of dilatory payments is questionable. It is very likely that their

---

<sup>86</sup> KvW.

<sup>87</sup> GL, MS 25,473.

<sup>88</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 303; Campbell, 'Finances', pp. 362, 334.

<sup>89</sup> Campbell, 'Fortune', p. 303.

profit would have exceeded the 11% William earned outside his contract, but by how much, remains unknown.

These calculations exclude the significant profits which the Burford Masons made on the sale of their stone, an asset not enjoyed by the majority of mason-contractors. But whatever the profit on a project, it represented a simple difference between income and expenditure, from which other necessary outgoings had to be financed such as living costs, and reinvesting in the firm, perhaps in tools, quarrying equipment and carts, and building up reserves. These overheads are not ascertainable from the sources. Only after such disbursements could profit be used to generate income as capital, and ultimately raise the contractor's financial and social standing.

### **THE BURFORD MASONS' USE OF CAPITAL**

There are assumptions in the literature that capital was central to large mason-contracting firms. James Ayres asserted that 'on large scale undertakings, as with the building of St Paul's, men such as Kempster were at the head of highly capitalised companies'.<sup>90</sup> Whilst recognising the importance of capitalisation, he provided no evidence to substantiate his claim, apart from referring to Christopher Cass being awarded the mason's contract for St Martin in the Fields in 1721 partly because he gave 'sufficient security'. Colvin, looking at dilatory payments at the Office of Works, assumed that 'only craftsmen with extensive

---

<sup>90</sup> James Ayres, *Building the Georgian City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 77.

capital had the financial stamina to wait for payment'.<sup>91</sup> Colvin based his assumptions on the survival of firms in the face of seriously delayed payments. Neither Ayres nor Colvin addresses the question of how individual masons achieved and maintained capitalisation. Knoop and Jones had previously looked at the question of whether London masons obtained credit from banks and concluded there was no evidence to that effect.<sup>92</sup> This chapter, however, seeks to trace how the Burford Masons capitalised their firms, scrutinising their relationships with the emerging banking sector, and examining evidence of loans from family. It goes on to investigate their use of capital to generate income.

### **Raising credit**

It might be expected that the Burford Masons turned to goldsmiths or, a little later, to the newly-established banks for loans to capitalise their businesses in order to compete successfully and help them carry the substantial sums owed to them. After consulting *British Banking* to locate archives of the period, the Royal Bank of Scotland as the current successors of Messrs. Child & Co. and Drummond & Co., and Coutts, have both confirmed that they hold no record of accounts in the names of Strong, Kempster or Beauchamp.<sup>93</sup> Examination of selected accounts of Thomas Fowle, goldsmith, at The National Archives has not revealed any of the Burford Masons' names either.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> *HKW*, p. 44.

<sup>92</sup> *London Mason*, p. 51.

<sup>93</sup> Orbell and Turton; author's correspondence with Coutts and the Royal Bank of Scotland, 2008.

<sup>94</sup> TNA, PRO C 104/107-8.

Inspection of Hoare's Bank archives has shown that Ephraim Beauchamp passed £100 through the Bank between January and March 1701.<sup>95</sup> Edward Strong kept an account there from October 1695 until April 1712. Several other major mason-contractors had accounts at Hoare's, such as Thomas Cartwright and Samuel Fulkes. Fulkes opened his account in 1695 just seven weeks before Strong, and like Strong, with £100 received 'by note'. A note at this time was likely to indicate a bill of exchange, rather than a cheque or bank note.<sup>96</sup> The similarity of entries might suggest that both of these were payments for work at St Paul's, where the two masons were running contracts at the time, but there is no mirror payment in the building accounts to support this.<sup>97</sup> The presence of the name William Vanbrugh (likely the Secretary to Greenwich Hospital's Fabric Committee, Sir John's first cousin) in Strong's account between 1704 and 1706 suggests that this is related to his work at Greenwich.<sup>98</sup> The account was overdrawn by forty pounds for a couple of weeks only in February and March 1706, but no interest was charged; equally, no interest was paid on money invested. Hoare's had at this time suspended paying interest on deposits in order to promote interest-free lending.<sup>99</sup> Both Beauchamp's and Strong's use of Hoare's Bank was limited to paying in a large sum and withdrawing it in smaller amounts shortly afterwards, effectively using it as a clearing bank. William Kempster is also likely to have used a bank for this purpose, as the words 'number of Banke note 6993', scribbled at the foot of one of his daybooks, suggest.<sup>100</sup> No record of a Kempster bank account has been found.

---

<sup>95</sup> Hoare's Bank Archives.

<sup>96</sup> Edwin Nevin and E.W. Davis, *The London Clearing Banks* (London: Elek Books, 1970), p. 21.

<sup>97</sup> GL, MS 25,473/30.

<sup>98</sup> *London Mason*, p. 52.

<sup>99</sup> Hutchings, p. 11.

<sup>100</sup> KvW.



In the early years of the Bank of England, the privilege of opening an account was mainly limited to people of social standing in London.<sup>101</sup> Having checked their archives, the only Burford Mason to use this Bank was Edward Strong junior, opening his account on 19 July 1716, the day work started at Blenheim, as noted in the previous chapter. The account was opened with amounts totalling £4242 15s.9d., substantial sums continuing to run through his account over some twenty-five years until his death in 1741, when £4500 remained.<sup>102</sup>

The Strongs, and Beauchamp to a minor extent, used these two banks over forty years as clearing banks only. No evidence could be found of Burford Masons raising credit through these Banks. Banks were not the only source of credit available, however. Edward Strong senior used a merchant for credit in connection with his son Edward's continental travels with Wren's son Christopher, probably in 1699, Wren writing to his own son 'Mr Strong hath profered credit by the same merchant he uses for his son', which Wren was also considering using. 'Profer' in this instance probably meant 'to put into contact with'. Wren's son was at that time using a different merchant, to whom he still owed money.<sup>103</sup>

Family acted as a significant source of credit for at least the Kempsters. It has been seen how Christopher subsidised William for fourteen months when payments were not forthcoming at St Paul's.<sup>104</sup> This suggests that Christopher Kempster's business was already highly capitalised, whilst William's was clearly not yet. Another of William's daybooks contains an entry for him paying his brother-in-law Richard Richards six pounds' interest on a loan in 1704, which at a likely five per cent (the rate paid by St Paul's), would equate

---

<sup>101</sup> Author's conversation with BOE Archivist, 2009.

<sup>102</sup> BEA, C.98/2653, L.142.

<sup>103</sup> WS, XIX (1942), 119; Oxford English Dictionary, ed. by John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, 2nd edn, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), xii, p. 57.

<sup>104</sup> KvW.

to a loan of £120, over nine thousand pounds in today's money.<sup>105</sup> It is likely that family loans were usually on an informal basis and went undocumented, or any documentation made was destroyed once the loan was repaid. William's daybooks are the only source revealing these instances of interpersonal credit.

Of the above scant evidence for Burford Masons raising credit for their business, none predates the 1690s. It might be expected that their need for borrowing would have occurred earlier in their London careers were it not for the fact that they had spent some years prior to their first contract selling stone, the profit from which doubtless supported them in the coming lean years, the importance of which is investigated below.

### **Generating income from their own capital**

Although there is little evidence for Burford Masons raising funding for their business from sources outside the dynasties, records are more forthcoming on their use of capital to generate income.

In the later seventeenth century, offering interest-bearing credit was viewed as a significant form of income. Craig Muldrew observes that borrowing within the family circle was still important at the time.<sup>106</sup> This emerges from the wills and inventories of Burford Masons where the debt was still outstanding. Ephraim Beauchamp's loan of £250 to his brother Benjamin, repayable at interest, was still outstanding at the time of Benjamin's death in

---

<sup>105</sup> KvW; Lang, p. 180; GL, MS 5303.

<sup>106</sup> Muldrew, p. 116.

1697.<sup>107</sup> In 1707 William Kempster lent his brother-in-law Edward Francis sixty pounds, also at interest, as security for which Francis gave his house in Norwood, now south London.<sup>108</sup> A schedule made by Edward Strong senior's executor notes a mortgage to Strong's uncle William for a house in Little Barrington, Gloucestershire.<sup>109</sup> Strong's mortgage to his brother-in-law Benjamin Beauchamp in 1693, for properties in Soho, was, however, formally documented by indenture.<sup>110</sup>

The Stronges were also active lenders of capital outside the family. The conversion of arrears for contractors' payments at St Paul's into interest-bearing loans has already been mentioned. The sums on deposit varied over time as masons took assignments of other masons' deposits, for example Christopher Kempster taking an assignment of Nathaniel Rawlins' deposit of £300 in 1697.<sup>111</sup> Interest on these loans was often paid in arrears by the Commissioners, so for the masons, deposits were perhaps more important for securing ongoing employment at St Paul's than for income. This is endorsed by New's deposit of £3100 noted earlier.

Examination of City parish records has revealed that Edward Strong lent some £1200 to St Stephen Walbrook vestry, which was still outstanding in 1712.<sup>112</sup> The London Masons' Company was another beneficiary of loans from the Burford Masons. Its records reveal that from 1680, Edward Strong was receiving 5% interest on a loan of around five hundred pounds, and although the principal of the loan varied, part was still outstanding in 1711.

---

<sup>107</sup> TNA, PRO C 8/608/3 Inventory of Benjamin Beacham's debts.

<sup>108</sup> KvW.

<sup>109</sup> Bodl., MS Top. Herts. c.2.

<sup>110</sup> BL, MS 0/382/3.

<sup>111</sup> GL, MS 25,473/32.

<sup>112</sup> GL, MS 593/4.

Christopher Kempster lent the Company money too, ten pounds towards the costs of obtaining its charter in 1677, and made another loan in 1701.<sup>113</sup>

In view of the building boom, it is not surprising that loans raised to finance private building, by mortgage or bond, were a popular commodity. Both mortgages and bonds enjoyed new protection by law, and were used when substantial amounts of money were involved and needed to be protected.<sup>114</sup> Interest was always charged, in response to the great demand for such a secure form of credit. In 1724 Edward junior provided a mortgage of £2000 to Sir William Stapleton for his prestigious house at no. 31 Old Burlington Street (Figure 68), and for various properties in Threadneedle Street, including the Crown Tavern behind the Royal Exchange.<sup>115</sup> Examination of Edward junior's copy-book letters discloses loans as disparate as a bond of £722 4s. 6d. to King's College, Cambridge, and a loan on Rye Harbour.<sup>116</sup> Indentures lodged at The National Archives attest Edward Strong junior's brother Thomas providing a mortgage on a house in Hanover Square around 1734.<sup>117</sup> Not all loans turned out to be successful ventures, however; Edward Strong senior's bond of £100 to the Earl of Clarendon was among those 'Bonds and Notes esteemed to be bad' by Strong's executor in 1725.<sup>118</sup> Edward junior's letter-book copies show that he too experienced difficulties in extracting arrears from some of his tenants.<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>113</sup> GL, MSS 5303 and 5322.

<sup>114</sup> Muldrew, pp. 110, 113, 115.

<sup>115</sup> *Survey of London*, ed. by F.H.W. Sheppard, (London: Athlone, 1963), XXXII, pt II (1963), p. 508; TNA, PRO C 111/194.

<sup>116</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>117</sup> TNA, PRO C 111/201.

<sup>118</sup> Bodl., MS Top. Herts. c.2.

<sup>119</sup> SM, Letter-book.

Ownership of property in the form of buildings and landed estates, however, generally produced a solid rental income for the Strongs and Beauchamp in particular. Yet as a form of investment, land compared unfavourably with most others, the M.P. Lord Hervey observing in 1707, 'How much better money yields than land, after which taxes and repairs allowed never answers above three percent'.<sup>120</sup> Land nonetheless remained an attractive acquisition, particularly for the aspirational, as it was considered to confer status on the owner. As noted by the cleric Thomas Adams in the previous century, 'reputation is measured by the acre'.<sup>121</sup> By the end of Edward Strong senior's life, he possessed extensive property investments over several counties, detailed in Chapter Two.<sup>122</sup> Such was the extent of the Strongs' land acquisition in the St Albans' area that the Duchess of Marlborough, who originated from there, wrote to Sir John Vanbrugh 'I can't help remarking that since he [Strong] was employed at Blenheim He has bought some Farnes that the Duke of Marlborough wou'd willingly have purchased, Lying so near My Father's Estate'.<sup>123</sup> Although these investments were split up among Edward senior's family when he died, Edward junior managed to accumulate at least a similar amount of property.<sup>124</sup>

Ephraim Beauchamp accrued property in fourteen parts of the City and counties close to London, his name ceasing to be associated with construction after the age of fifty-five.<sup>125</sup> Other successful masons of the period similarly invested in property, such as William

---

<sup>120</sup> Peter Earle, *The Making of the English Middle Class: Business, Society and Family Life in London, 1660-1730* (London: Methuen, 1989), p. 152.

<sup>121</sup> Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>122</sup> Edward Strong senior's will: TNA, PROB 11/596.

<sup>123</sup> Green, p. 260.

<sup>124</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>125</sup> Peter Beauchamp, 'The Life and Times of a C17th Westminster Builder', *Westminster History Review*, 4 (2001), 6-13 (p.10); Ephraim Beauchamp's will: TNA, PROB 11/624; WS, XI (1934), 79.

Townesend of Oxford, and Francis Smith of Warwick.<sup>126</sup> Christopher Kempster, by contrast, bought three houses in the Burford area, mainly for his family's use, and the freehold of Kitt's Quarry when it became available in 1694.<sup>127</sup>

Despite Edward junior intimating in 1730 that he was no longer undertaking building work, his Bank of England account shows a single receipt of £5170 on 11 April 1738, its origin unidentified.<sup>128</sup> This sum is almost five times larger than previous ingoing sums in the 1730s and, as a single payment, unlikely to represent income from investment properties. In the 'Book of Entry for Masons Work done at Severall of ye 50 new Churches' which Edward junior kept with his partner Edward Tufnell, accounts are found around this time for masons' work on the north-west tower of Westminster Abbey.<sup>129</sup> These entries are in a different hand to those preceding, and span the period from March 1737 to December 1743, some two years after Edward junior's death. The entries for measurements up to December 1737 total £3058, followed by a measurement in June 1738 for £927. The building accounts for the west towers, completed between 1733 and 1745 under the Surveyors Hawksmoor and John James make no mention of Edward Strong, but do identify Samuel Tufnell, son of Strong's late partner Edward, as one of the master masons during this period.<sup>130</sup> The coincidence of abnormally high payments to his account, records in his 'Book of Entry', and Tufnell's activity suggests that Edward junior had a financial involvement in the work and, presumably, income.

---

<sup>126</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', p.55; Gomme, p. 87.

<sup>127</sup> BT, D660-662.

<sup>128</sup> BEA, C.98/2639, L. 128.

<sup>129</sup> RIBA, TUF/1.

<sup>130</sup> Author's correspondence with the Assistant Keeper of Westminster Abbey Muniments, 2007.

Stocks were emerging as attractive financial investments in the new capital-based economy. In 1726 Edward Strong junior purchased the Bank of England's managed Government stock for the sum of £12,500, the amount and timing suggesting that the money came from his Blenheim arrears settlement.<sup>131</sup> This formed part of his estate when he died, together with £9000 of the Bank of England's own stock which he had purchased (Figure 69). As a personal investment which Edward had no need to draw on in his lifetime, this indicates considerable wealth.

With the exception of stocks, at a time when others might have considered investing their money for income in shipping, trade, or speculating in what became known as the South Sea Bubble, the Burford Masons have been seen to invest in what they understood, property; even their loans to the Masons' Company reflect this preference. Such accumulation of wealth and landholding facilitated the social rise of the Stronges and Ephraim Beauchamp, and to a much lesser extent, Christopher Kempster.

### **STRATEGIES USED BY THE BURFORD MASONS TO COUNTER THE EFFECTS OF DILATORY PAYMENTS**

Having looked at profit and the Burford Masons' use of capital, other means by which they sustained their businesses are now examined. Perhaps the single most important factor which alleviated the debts owed to the Burford Masons was the sale of stone from their own quarries.

---

<sup>131</sup> Society of Genealogists, Index to Bank of England Wills, no. 740.

## Sale of stone

It was shown in Chapter Three, on the evidence of Christopher Kempster's Daybook and the Strong Memorandums, that both quarryowners almost certainly began selling stone for the London rebuilding as early as 1667. Having entered the London market at an early stage, which was in urgent need of building materials, they are likely to have enjoyed significant profits from five years' sale of stone before their first known contract in London. This enabled Strong and Kempster to build up capital before taking on contracts in London, a clear advantage over London masons. London was not the only market for stone, however, as between 1667 and 1681 Strong also 'sold Great Quantities [of stone] to Windsor Castle', conveniently located down the Thames, the profit from which would also have helped capitalise the Strong firm.<sup>132</sup>

Since payment for stone included the cost of transport, the only major additional expenditure which the Strong and Kempsters incurred was in extracting the stone from their quarries.<sup>133</sup> Kempster's Daybook, although it centres on the family's business in Burford, does not contain sufficient detail to assess the specific costs of their quarrying operation, in particular the number of men employed in the extraction process. By comparison to the income from the stone, it is likely to have been a relatively small outlay, so dilatory payments for stone were likely to be sustainable even over many years.

Once they embarked on contracts in London, they were often able to sell their stone for use on those commissions, the price of the stone used being included in each periodic

---

<sup>132</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>133</sup> Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House 1660-1880* (London: Hambledon, 2000), p. 190.



measurement, forming a constituent part of their arrears. The impact of the total arrears they had to bear was thus alleviated by the element for their own quarrrystone. Upon eventual payment, the profit on the stone sold was likely to be considerable.

Attempts to ascertain the full extent of sales of Burford stone from building accounts has proved inconclusive, owing to the vagueness of its description and duplication of recording. The Strong Memorandums, however, provide estimates for income from workmanship and stone at St Paul's Cathedral and Blenheim Palace. For the period from 1681 to 1716 at St Paul's, Edward Strong senior estimated he received £46,110 7s. 0d. for workmanship, and £21,216 5s. 5d. for stone, totalling over five million pounds in today's money.<sup>134</sup> For Blenheim Palace, he estimated £19,315 5s. 7d. for workmanship, and £8786 8s. 2d. for stone. In both cases, payment for stone constituted almost half that for workmanship. This ratio is reflected in the Strongs' law suit claiming around £6000 for workmanship, and £3000 for stone.<sup>135</sup> No evidence has been found of the use of stone from the Kempster quarries at St Paul's Cathedral, although, like the Strongs' stone, it was certainly used for City churches. Ephraim Beauchamp, married into the Strong family, also sold the Strongs' stone, for instance whilst working on St Dunstan-in-the-East in 1695.<sup>136</sup> However, at Greenwich Hospital, where large arrears also accrued, the Strongs do not appear to have used their own quarrrystone, so this factor would not have helped, nor at Winchester Palace, although the arrears there amounted to much less.

As noted in the previous chapter, the opportunity to sell their own stone probably enabled the Burford Masons to enter into large contracts, and at lower rates. Their ability to supply

---

<sup>134</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>135</sup> Green, p. 128.

<sup>136</sup> GL, MS 25,539/2.

large quantities of consistently good stone at first hand, and being in control of the timing of its delivery, would have given them a strong competitive edge when competing for contracts.<sup>137</sup>

It was normal practice for masons to act as suppliers of stone from other quarries as well, and the Burford Masons were no exception.<sup>138</sup> For St Paul's, William Kempster's receipts show that he bought Portland and Purbeck stone from John Slyford, the wharfinger, whereas the Strong's additionally bought direct from the Portland quarries, paying for the shipping themselves, and storing stone at their yard in Greenwich.<sup>139</sup> Ephraim Beauchamp sourced more *recherché* stone for St Paul's such as Denmark paving, Swede marble, Caen stone, and alabaster.<sup>140</sup> When settlement was received, profit from these transactions would help offset arrears.

### **Family firm**

It has been noted that members of the Kempster and Strong families remained in the Burford area to run the quarries in the absence of heads of firms, providing an ample workforce to select stone and ensure its quality, and organise its shipment to London.

---

<sup>137</sup> *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, ed. by R.T. Gunther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 84.

<sup>138</sup> Malcolm Airs, *The Tudor and Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), p. 131.

<sup>139</sup> KvW; GL, MS 5329; Lang, p. 174.

<sup>140</sup> GL, MS 25,471/32.

In the later seventeenth century most men in the Strong and Kempster families, including several sons-in law, were trained as masons, an indication of the profitability of their business. Examination of building and bank accounts, and daybooks, provides some idea of the involvement of family members in the firm. Christopher Kempster's brother John appears as payee in the building accounts for Winchester Palace, no doubt because he was overseeing the contract, leaving Christopher free to continue in London. Christopher's son William's name appears in the Chamberlain's accounts for Abingdon Town Hall, and although later crossed out, indicates that William had been working there.<sup>141</sup> Christopher's eldest son Christopher, and son-in-law Thomas Hands, worked with Christopher senior on a substantial, but unidentified, construction in Oxford in the 1680s, Christopher senior jotting down in his 1685 Almanack 'my son Christopher wrought at Oxford 450 days | Tho Hands wrought at Oxford 595 days | I rought myself 142<sup>1/2</sup>'.<sup>142</sup> The extent of the work indicates that this probably refers to a college building, but examination of building accounts for New College, University College, Magdalen College, and The Queen's College, where construction was taking place at the time, have not provided evidence of their involvement. Christopher senior's almanacks and loose papers reveal him employing his son Edward at St Paul's as well as at St Mary-at-Hill.<sup>143</sup> His substantial financial assistance with William's first contract at St Paul's has been noted. William's London daybooks show him employing his brother Edward, brother-in-law Richard Richards, and son William at St Paul's around 1706, as well as Thomas Strong, in 1707 and between 1714 and 1716.<sup>144</sup> Thomas Strong is found in Edward Strong junior's bank accounts, working for

---

<sup>141</sup> RIBA, WRE/1, fol. 236; ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts.

<sup>142</sup> K<sub>v</sub>W.

<sup>143</sup> GL, MS 5304/1; K<sub>v</sub>W.

<sup>144</sup> K<sub>v</sub>W.

him between 1717 and 1730 on unidentified projects.<sup>145</sup> Edward junior also employed his cousin Oswell at St Paul's and Greenwich, and his nephew and apprentice Edward Beauchamp at St Paul's.<sup>146</sup>

Close relatives working as employees no doubt proved conscientious craftsmen, likely to be flexible about pay and conditions, having loyalty to the family and often a shared financial interest in the success of the project. They could act as trusted overseers, leaving the head of the firm free to attend other contracts.

Ephraim Beauchamp, having married into the Strong family, was quickly absorbed into the family firm, before establishing his own business. Beauchamp selling stone from the Strong's quarries was noted above.<sup>147</sup> Intermarriage between contractors' families gave strength to a firm by spreading financial risk.<sup>148</sup> The Beauchamp family, being yeoman farmers and owning property in Burford, would not have been without financial standing, and would have been an asset to the Strong family.<sup>149</sup> Intermarriage could enlarge a family's skill base, in this case, two of Ephraim's brothers were trained as carpenters, Joseph remaining in Burford, Benjamin moving to London and becoming an entrepreneur, occasionally obtaining funding from Edward Strong.<sup>150</sup> These examples illustrate their own kinship bonds as well as inter-reliance between the dynasties.

---

<sup>145</sup> BEA, C.98/2553, 42-86.

<sup>146</sup> *London Mason*, pp. 90, 76.

<sup>147</sup> GL, MS 25,539/8.

<sup>148</sup> Campbell, 'Carpentry Trade', p. 229.

<sup>149</sup> Will and Inventory of Edward Beauchamp, yeoman: ORO, MS Wills 7/2/43.

<sup>150</sup> Beauchamp, pp. 6, 8.

The size of these family firms gives some idea of the important role family members played in their business operations. When competing for contracts, the Burford Masons could take a long view of dilatory payments, in the knowledge that the family firm was likely to continue for the foreseeable future, and was strong enough to support them. The Stronges particularly were able to draw on the accumulated experience of several generations, lessening the likelihood of damaging their business through inaccurate estimates.

Despite the Strong and the Kempster firms keeping their home base in the Burford area, the sources are not very forthcoming about their masonry activity there. Burford in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was enjoying a period of prosperity, largely brought about by the popularity of the nearby horse races, the associated rise of tanning and saddlery, and being a strategic coaching stop.<sup>151</sup> Many stone houses and inns were rebuilt or refronted around this time, some of them prestigious, such as the Old Rectory (Figure 70), the Great House (Figure 71), and the current Methodist Church (Figure 72), built to sophisticated designs, suggesting the use of skilled and knowledgeable masons. The Strong or Kempster firms with their London-acquired experience would have been obvious choices to commission as mason-architects for these buildings. The family's activity in their home area would have strengthened the firms' financial position in London.

---

<sup>151</sup> Gretton, p. 64.

## Formation of partnerships

Entering into a partnership was a means of sharing the risks of a contract, also enabling partners to run others concurrently. Between 1665 and 1730, the Burford Masons formed at least twenty-five partnerships (Figure 73). Looking at these partnerships, a number of different types emerge. Partnerships were formed within a family firm, for instance between Edward Strong senior and his son Edward, to take on the Greenwich Hospital and Blenheim contracts. The question arises as to why father and son formed partnerships. Edward junior completed his apprenticeship only in 1698, so it is likely that his father included him in the prestigious contract for Greenwich the following year to advance his career. Six years later, Edward senior, already in his fifties, probably named his son as partner to secure continuation of the contract within the family.

Another family collaboration occurred when William Kempster was awarded the contract for the south-west tower of St Paul's in 1700, a time when payments were seriously in arrears, so it would have been difficult to attract a partner. Instead, his father Christopher acted as a quasi-partner in shouldering William's outgoings for the first fourteen months, as noted earlier. William remained a sole contractor, building up his workforce at St Paul's to around sixty-five by 1706.<sup>152</sup>

The Burford Masons also formed partnerships between the dynasties. As has been seen, the contract for St Stephen Walbrook was taken by Christopher Kempster and Thomas Strong in partnership. They were the first to take any City church contract as partners, recognising

---

<sup>152</sup> KvW.

the risk of working on the extraordinary. This arrangement proved very circumspect in view of what turned out to be a ten-year wait for payment, effectively halving the burden of arrears for each partner. Their partnership also allowed them to run several contracts at the same time, as only one partner needed to be on site to oversee work. Strong, whilst engaged on St Stephen Walbrook, took on contracts for St Paul's, St Benet Paul's Wharf, and St Augustine Old Change.<sup>153</sup> Strong and Kempster went on to become partners for the foundations contract at Winchester Palace in 1683, even opening a joint account to run the contract, 'Mr Stronge recd more for mee on the Joint account £59 10s.', Christopher Kempster recorded in his Almanack for 1685.<sup>154</sup> The longest-running partnership between the Burford Masons was that of Christopher Kempster and Ephraim Beauchamp at St Paul's, lasting seventeen years between 1690 and 1707, another circumspect arrangement.

The third type of partnership which the Burford Masons formed was with partners outside their group. Their earliest one known was with the carpenter Thomas Minchin at Trinity College in the 1660s, with Strong the sole master mason.<sup>155</sup> Later partnerships were concluded with masons, for instance Edward Strong senior with Thomas Hill at Greenwich in 1696, and Edward Strong junior with Edward Tufnell for the Queen Anne Churches at Greenwich, Westminster, Limehouse, Wapping, Deptford, and Bloomsbury, all between 1713 and Tufnell's death in 1719.<sup>156</sup> Edward junior was later in partnership with masons Christopher Cass and Andrews Jelfe until 1728, after which he partnered Cass on the tower of St Alfege, Greenwich, in 1730.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> GL, MS 25,242/2.

<sup>154</sup> KvW.

<sup>155</sup> TCA, III E/1.

<sup>156</sup> RIBA, WRE 2/3; LPL, MS 2703.

<sup>157</sup> BL, Stowe MS 412, no. 77; LPL, MS 2703.

Partnerships were occasionally foisted on them, as at Tom Tower, where Christ Church insisted on using its own mason Thomas Robinson as well as Wren's choice Christopher Kempster, and at St Vedast alias Foster, where the Vestry demanded that its parishioner mason William Collins partnered Edward Strong.<sup>158</sup> As the building accounts make no mention of Collins, he may not have taken an active part in the building process.<sup>159</sup>

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, most of these partnerships were probably loose associations, not legally set up. However, Edward Strong junior did enter a formal partnership with masons Christopher Cass and Jelfe, being 'copartners in a joint Stock', carrying on 'joyntly the Trade and Business of a Mason', which was dissolved at Edward's request in December 1728.<sup>160</sup> As 'joint stock' involved cash advanced to a business, the legal documentation was circumspect.<sup>161</sup> It may also be that by this time, it was considered advisable to establish partnerships on a legal basis, as in the case of the Bastards of Blandford, brothers who in 1720/1 sealed a tripartite indenture to continue being partners as joiners.<sup>162</sup>

The formation of partnerships between masons appears to have become accepted practice in the eighteenth century. Around 1718 Edward Stanton entered into partnership with Christopher Horsenaile; William Stanton with John Churchill in 1727; and Jelfe not only

---

<sup>158</sup> CCM, MS 376; WS, xix (1942), 90; SM, Letter-book.

<sup>159</sup> GL, MS 25,539/6.

<sup>160</sup> BL, Stowe Ms 412, no. 77.

<sup>161</sup> J.R. Edwards, *A History of Financial Accounting* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 93.

<sup>162</sup> Howard M. Colvin 'The Bastards of Blandford', *Archaeological Journal*, 104 (1947), 178-195 (p. 180).



with Strong and Cass, but with Cass alone, then George Mercer, and finally Samuel Tufnell.<sup>163</sup> This may reflect on increasing precariousness in the building industry.

### **Diversification of clients**

The Burford Masons' clients who tended to pay erratically were mainly commissions set up by statute, or, in the case of Winchester Palace, the Crown. Blenheim Palace started as a Crown project, although the client was ultimately determined at law to be the Duke of Marlborough. The Burford Masons however, also took contracts from other clients, which would have spread their risk, particularly when the contracts ran concurrently. Intermittent payments for their several contemporaneous contracts would have provided some income, albeit settled in arrears. Overlapping commissions can be seen in the timelines in the *Catalogue Raisonné*.

One such group of clients were institutions. As seen in the previous chapter, Kempster's weekly payments from Christ Church, Oxford, for Tom Tower, and Abingdon Borough Council's intermittent payments for work on County Hall, Berkshire, would have helped offset the dilatory payments for his work in the City between 1677 and 1684. St Bartholomew's Hospital was also a prompt payer when Edward Strong junior designed and built the Smithfield gateway, at a time when the Hospital enjoyed a small surplus of income.<sup>164</sup> The College of Arms, however, proved less dependable, as Ephraim Beauchamp

---

<sup>163</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 572.

<sup>164</sup> SM, Letter-book; *A Short History of St Bartholomew's Hospital 1123-1923*, ed. by Sir D'Arcy Power and H.J. Waring, (London: St. Bartholomew's Hospital, 1923), p. 19.

was still owed some payment for building the east wing in 1687, six years after completion.<sup>165</sup>

Clients from the aristocracy and gentry also expanded the Burford Masons' employment base, although relatively little is known about their reliability in settling payment. For Sir John Morden, Edward Strong senior 'performed all the Stone Work' in constructing his Hospital in Blackheath in 1694.<sup>166</sup> Ephraim Beauchamp, in 1698, built a house in London for Sir Edward de Bouverie, the location of which has not been identified.<sup>167</sup> In 1702, Edward Strong junior was engaged by William Draper, Treasurer to the Commission for Greenwich Hospital, to build (and possibly design) Addiscombe House, Surrey; the Duchess of Marlborough commissioned him for the mason's work at Marlborough House, London in 1709; and for the Earl of Chandos, he built the north elevation of Canons Park, Middlesex, in 1715.<sup>168</sup> Of these clients, it is known that the Duchess of Marlborough paid promptly.<sup>169</sup>

William Kempster's daybooks reveal commissions between 1700 and 1717 from prestigious clients such as Lady Rawlinson, widow of Sir Thomas, former Lord Mayor of London, at Old Bailey, and Squire Lenthall, Lord of the Manor, at Burford Priory; for both clients he made grand chimneypieces. He laid new Purbeck stone paving for Lord Willoughby in Queen's Square (now 26 Queen Anne's Gate), and at the Hertfordshire country houses Balls Park for Colonel Harrison, and Hertingfordbury Park for Mr

---

<sup>165</sup> CAA, Chapter Book 1, fol. 304.

<sup>166</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>167</sup> Ingrid Roscoe, Emma Hardy and M.G. Sullivan, eds, *Biographical Dictionary of Sculptors in Britain 1660-1851* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 87; author's correspondence with Ingrid Roscoe, 2007.

<sup>168</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>169</sup> BL, Add.MSS 61357, cclvii.

Hughes.<sup>170</sup> Even payment for these relatively modest works would have helped offset the monies owed him as mason-contractor at St Paul's, where he was engaged until his death in 1718.

William's daybooks also illustrate the importance of clients from business and trade. These included the newly-established Coffee Houses such as those at St Paul's, All Saints, Ludgate, and Blackfriars; Public Houses including the 'Haunch of Venison' in Bow Lane, the 'Crown' in Milk Street, and the 'Dog Tavern' on Garlick Hill for his neighbour Mr Breckforth. Other trade clients include Mr Austin the winecooper, Mr Ikey the tobacconist, and the whalebone cutter in Bow Lane, where William laid Reigate stone for his furnace.<sup>171</sup> Analysis of Christopher Kempster's Daybook has shown that whilst he was running late-paying contracts in London, the Kempsters continued to carry out building work in Burford such as installing new windows, a chimney and roof for John Jordan in 1671, or erecting gate piers for the Priory in 1680.<sup>172</sup> The number of such clients who paid in full helped to sustain Christopher financially.

Funerary monuments, the stock-in-trade of masons particularly during the slack winter months, provided an even wider base of clients.<sup>173</sup> It can be seen from Christopher Kempster's Daybook that whilst working on St Stephen Walbrook, he fashioned the handsome Sylvester monument in Burford Church, for ten pounds (Figure 74).<sup>174</sup> William's daybooks record him making at least twenty gravestones and monuments for

---

<sup>170</sup> KvW.

<sup>171</sup> KvW.

<sup>172</sup> BT, Daybook, fols. F9<sup>r</sup> and F12<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>173</sup> Howard M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of British Architects*, 3rd edn, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 23.

<sup>174</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. B9<sup>r</sup>.

aristocracy and gentry between 1701 and 1716, many of black marble and gilded, with coats of arms, for which he charged around £12 each. Although William crafted these funerary monuments in London, they were often sent further afield, usually by river barge, for instance to Godalming, Marlow, Henley, and Burford, and to Northamptonshire. It was to William that his family turned for his father's wall memorial (Figure 75) and the Kempster ledger slab (horizontal gravestone) in Burford church (Figure 76).<sup>175</sup> In the Burford area wealthy merchants were the clients commissioning the prestigious churchyard monuments known as 'bale' tombs, which all three dynasties were involved in crafting. Bale tombs are discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

## **Diversification of trade**

### ***Farming***

The Kempster and Beauchamp families were yeoman farmers in the Burford area, as noted particularly in Appendix One. An estimated half of English farmers in the seventeenth century were also part-time craftsmen, emphasizing the importance of farming as a 'by-occupation', as described by Knoop and Jones.<sup>176</sup> Around 1670, Sir William Coventry was writing that few building craftsmen 'rely entirely on their Trade as not to have a small Farm'.<sup>177</sup> Masons with a fallback position of a smallholding to work in leaner times would have been able to risk more than those without. It also enabled families to survive whilst the masons worked elsewhere. Kempster's Daybook, recording the family business in

---

<sup>175</sup> KvW.

<sup>176</sup> Arkell, p. 79; *The Mediaeval Mason*, 3rd edn., (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 88.

<sup>177</sup> Cited by Airs, p. 164.

Burford, chronicles an active farming life of sowing, haymaking, harvesting, and malting, regardless of Christopher's absence in London. His purchase of Kitts quarry in 1694 included over twenty acres of farmland in the Burford area.<sup>178</sup> Evidence for Ephraim Beauchamp's farming background is found in his father's inventory made at his death in 1682, referring to a 'pigg in the sty' and 'sheep hurdles'.<sup>179</sup> It was clearly not unusual for masons in Burford to have farming interests, as the will for another mason in the town, Symon Ward, noted the 'residue of my goods, Cattelle and Chattells' in 1648.<sup>180</sup>

### *Sale of malt*

The sale of malt became a profitable sideline. Malt was a valuable, taxable commodity and its production had developed into a major industry in Burford, to the extent that one Supervisor of Excise and two Excisemen were permanently based in the town in the eighteenth century.<sup>181</sup> London, by comparison, had no malt works, the malting process requiring an extensive floor area.<sup>182</sup> A large brewing business was emerging in London providing a thirsty market for malt. Loose receipts at The National Archives reveal Christopher Kempster selling malt in London on several occasions in 1699, which his son John and son-in-law Nicholas Cross sent from Burford. One entry in the receipts records 'When all charge paied the molt comes to 98:13:6 [...] John Kempsters part 42 Quarter at 1:7:6 the Quarter 58:7:0. Nicholas Cross his part 29 Quarter at 1:7:6 the Quarter 40:6:6'

---

<sup>178</sup> BT, D662.

<sup>179</sup> ORO, MS Wills 7/2/43.

<sup>180</sup> TNA, PROB 11/203.

<sup>181</sup> Moody, p. 92.

<sup>182</sup> *The Eighteenth-Century Town*, ed. by Peter Borsay (London: Longman, 1990), p. 150; Moody, p. 91.

(Figure 77).<sup>183</sup> At over eight and a half thousand pounds' profit in today's money for apparently just one shipment, the sale of malt was not trivial. It is evident from the Kempster Daybook that, in order to sustain these deliveries, the Kempsters bought in large quantities of barley from farmers in the Burford area, and paid others for the 'macking of moults'.<sup>184</sup> The Kempsters co-ordinated the manufacture, shipping, and sale of malt to London, where they were likely to have had the market edge. Robert Plot noted that a more productive, early ripening strain of barley was being cultivated in Oxfordshire at this time, which was only slowly spreading to other counties.<sup>185</sup> The Kempsters were not the only masons to trade in malt as a sideline, it also formed part of the Oxford mason William Townesend's business.<sup>186</sup>

### ***Bricklaying***

Apart from grander public buildings, London was being rebuilt mainly in brick, providing only limited opportunities for the stonemason's traditional trade.<sup>187</sup> Bricklaying was also required for most City churches, as even those faced in stone used brick in their construction. The fact that some stonemasons took on bricklaying contracts for City churches was pointed out by Campbell as recently as 2002, noting three contracts taken by Thomas and Edward Strong senior.<sup>188</sup> Analysis of building accounts and contracts for the Burford Masons' work has identified ten cases of their involvement in building with brick,

---

<sup>183</sup> KvW.

<sup>184</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. F16<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>185</sup> Plot, p. 155.

<sup>186</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', p. 55.

<sup>187</sup> Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City 1660-1720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 80.

<sup>188</sup> James W.P. Campbell, 'Seventeenth-Century Bricklayers' Contracts: Wren's City Churches', *Construction History Society Newsletter*, 64 (2002), 7-12, (p. 8).

of which seven are for City churches (Figure 78). Thomas Strong, Edward senior and junior, and the later Thomas Strong, Christopher and William Kempster, and Ephraim Beauchamp all undertook commissions involving brickwork as well as stone, which would have widened their market potential. It is of interest that the last entry in William Kempster's daybook, in February 1718, is for payment to his bricklayer Mr Drew, for work not identified.<sup>189</sup>

Evidence of Burford Masons branching into bricklaying in City churches is found as early as 1674, when Strong and Kempster's work at St Stephen Walbrook was measured, which included incidental bricklaying.<sup>190</sup> Only four years later, Thomas Strong took a contract for constructing St Benet Paul's Wharf of brick, exercising skills which were to stand the Stronges in good stead on future projects. Although the livery companies controlling stonemasonry and bricklaying were autonomous, throughout the seventeenth century some of their members appear to have assumed the 'Custom of London' in carrying out work which strictly belonged to a different craft guild, regardless of the one to which they had been apprenticed, an issue explored in Chapter Six.<sup>191</sup> Knoop and Jones observed that in the provinces, 'specialisation was imperfect', building craftsmen being more likely to undertake work outside their trained craft.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, an interchange between masons laying stone and brick was noted at Eton College already in the 1440s. However, stonemasons would have had less opportunity to practise bricklaying in stone-producing areas such as Oxford and the Cotswolds, and the Burford Masons' branching out into brick would have been more taxing.

---

<sup>189</sup> KvW.

<sup>190</sup> GL, MS 25,539/1.

<sup>191</sup> Campbell, 'Carpentry Trade', p. 218.

<sup>192</sup> KJ, *Mediaeval Mason*, pp. 204, 132.

It is remarkable that Ephraim Beauchamp's first known contract in London in 1688 was not for stonemasonry, but for building the east wing of the College of Arms in brick (Figure 48). Other mason-contractors similarly took on contracts involving bricklaying, such as Samuel Fulkes, Edward Pierce, and Joshua Marshall.<sup>193</sup> A later, substantial, brick building by one of the Burford Masons was Ardington House, Berkshire, constructed by Thomas Strong around 1720.

My research has uncovered the Strongs using their bricklaying skills to venture into the speculative building market. Speculative development was predominantly brick-based, usually only finishes, chimneypieces and paving executed in stone. The mason who was able and willing to carry out bricklaying could enter into this market and reap its rewards, unlike the stonemason who limited himself to his craft. Whereas the main flush of residential rebuilding in the City took place relatively soon after the Fire, extensive construction went on apace outside the City. Edward Strong senior owned two houses in the Bridgewater Square development north of the Barbican, one on the west side of North West Alley, and another on the east side of Princes Street, which he let at two pounds and four pounds per annum respectively, having probably built both houses. The Bridgewater Square site was acquired by Wren and two others in 1688 with the expectation of an eight percent return, at a time when interest on loans was limited to only six percent.<sup>194</sup> Other master craftsmen working for Wren similarly owned houses in this enterprise, the masons Samuel Fulkes and John Thompson, plasterer Henry Dogood, and Sarjeant Plumber Matthew Roberts, who was to become Edward Strong junior's father-in-law. In Old Burlington Street, not only Edward Strong senior, but also Christopher Cass and Edward

---

<sup>193</sup> Campbell, 'Bricklayers' Contracts', p. 8.

<sup>194</sup> GL, MS 2461; Muldrew, p. 114.



Tufnell are found as mortgagees, suggesting that they may also have been associated with the construction of houses in that street.<sup>195</sup> In view of the huge opportunities for speculative builders at the time, it is likely that Burford Masons became more involved in speculative building than these examples show.

The east wing of the College of Arms was a hybrid project, allowing Ephraim Beauchamp to negotiate a leaseback of the three dwellings it was to comprise, two of which his family held until 1748.<sup>196</sup> The third lease passed to the Strong family on his death, Edward junior still using it in 1734 when he noted 'dined at St Peter's Hill'.<sup>197</sup>

Colvin observed that although speculative building brought great rewards, it could also bring bankruptcy.<sup>198</sup> That the Burford Masons managed to avoid the latter is to their credit as entrepreneurs.

## CONCLUSION

Dilatory payment has been identified as the overriding problem facing the Burford Masons after going up to London. The chapter showed the Burford Masons adapting to the increasingly capital-based economy of London with credit assuming an important role.

---

<sup>195</sup> *Survey of London*, pp. 558-9.

<sup>196</sup> *College of Arms*, ed. by Walter Godfrey (London: London Survey Committee, 1963), p. 20.

<sup>197</sup> Bodl. MS Top. Herts c.2; SM, Letter-book.

<sup>198</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 18.

Examination of six major late-paying commissions of the Burford Masons has revealed them to have been burdened by arrears over a period of some fifty years. In the 1670s for St Stephen Walbrook alone, Strong and Kempster carried arrears of £1,240; by the 1720s, the Strong's' arrears for Blenheim, including interest, had amounted to over twelve thousand pounds.

The Burford Masons were found to have developed strategies to counter the effects of dilatory payments. Of these strategies, sale of their stone was found to be of vital importance. Payment for stone outside their contracts, as from 1667 when shipping to London was shown to have started, allowed them to capitalise their firms over five years before taking on the risk of their first late-paying commission. When stone was supplied as part of a building contract, the component of arrears it represented involved few outgoings and was largely profit, once payment was received. Stone was found to comprise up to a third of the total arrears.

The Burford Masons had to devise further strategies for building up capital in order to function, turning them effectively into creditors on many of their commissions. The role of the family firm was shown to be a mainstay of their operation. Deployment of masons in and between the families allowed them to take on several contracts concurrently, promptly-paid ones alleviating the arrears burden. It was discovered that William Kempster could only start his contract on the south-west tower of St Paul's with his father's full financial support over fourteen months.

Entering into partnerships within and between the dynasties and with others was found to be a further strategy the Burford Masons employed for almost sixty years to share the burden of arrears and facilitate multiple contracts. Diversification of client has shown the Burford Masons taking on contracts in London, the country, and from the Crown, often running concurrently, which spread the risk. William Kempster's business as a City mason showed a wide range of clients. Diversifying into bricklaying and probably also entering speculative building further extended their client base.

In the course of their careers the Stronges increasingly used capital to generate income, by lending at interest, granting mortgages, involving themselves in insurance, acquiring stocks, and investing in property, turning them into financiers.

By countering the problem of dilatory payments successfully, the Burford Masons contributed to the speedy completion of many of the great projects of the rebuilding, and in so doing, probably helped safeguard their stylistic unity.

## **CHAPTER SIX:**

# **THE BURFORD MASONS' INVOLVEMENT WITH THE LONDON MASONS' COMPANY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The livery companies of seventeenth-century London evolved from the medieval craft or trade guilds within the square mile of the City. They were self-governing, but also participated in the government of the City through their electoral privileges. Each occupied a given position in their hierarchy, based on their economic or political power, the order of precedence being settled in 1515 by the Lord Mayor after years of dispute.<sup>1</sup> The first twelve Companies, which included the Mercers', Grocers' and Goldsmiths', were known as the 'Great Twelve', the remainder were referred to as the 'Minor Companies' which included the Masons' Company at number thirty. By the time of the Great Fire the number of livery companies had increased to over sixty. Contemporary members of the Masons' Company included such successful masons as Joshua Marshall, Thomas Cartwright, and Thomas Knight, mentioned in Chapter Three as early post-Fire purchasers of Kempster's stone.

This chapter examines the Burford Masons' involvement with the London Masons' Company, continuing my investigation into the shift to modern building practices, with which the Company was also struggling to adjust. Despite the provisions of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Corporation of London, *The Livery Companies of the City of London* (London: Corporation of London, 2001).

Rebuilding Act of 1667 granting master masons from outside the City equal working privileges to existing members of the Company, the first Burford Masons to go up to London, Christopher Kempster and Thomas Strong, chose to apply for admittance only three years later. This apparently superfluous move is even more surprising as these provincial masons had never been involved in a trade guild in their native area, nor in nearby Oxford. This chapter examines their motives for seeking membership of the Company, and the degree of their commitment to it, in the light of its contemporary standing.

The most comprehensive account of the history of the London Masons' Company, covering many centuries, is still Edward Conder junior's pioneering study *The Hole Crafte*, which takes in the Company's early connection with Freemasonry.<sup>2</sup> Knoop and Jones's study *The London Mason* draws on Conder, exploring the Company's position in the seventeenth century. The Company's own publication *The Worshipful Company of Masons* focuses on the history of its organisation.<sup>3</sup> All three are empirical studies based on primary sources, Knoop and Jones exploring several issues in a wider discussion, particularly the effectiveness of the Company's remaining trade functions. All three works conclude that the Company's control of trade and standards was waning by the later seventeenth century.

A more recent study of a contemporary building craft in the City of London, 'The Carpentry Trade in Seventeenth Century England' by James W.P. Campbell, sheds light on the working practices and relevance of the guild system, concluding that the London

---

<sup>2</sup> *Records of the Hole Crafte and Fellowship of Masons* (London: Swann Sonnenschein, 1894).

<sup>3</sup> *The Worshipful Company of Masons*, ed. by Francis Raymond Smith (n.p.: London Masons' Company, 1960).

building guilds never recovered from the post-Fire legislation which removed their monopoly of trade.<sup>4</sup> Looking at the City's livery companies more generally, *Pride without Prejudice*; *The Freedom*; and the Corporation of London's own publication *The Livery Companies of the City of London* explore the relationship between the companies and the City government.<sup>5</sup> The latter concludes that the decline of livery companies generally, not just the Masons' Company, began in the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup>

My study explores the interrelationship between the London Masons' Company and the Burford Masons over their long period of membership spanning over half a century, in the face of its accelerated decline. By concentrating on the evidence relating to three dynasties whose membership was optional, my research investigates the question of the benefits which the Company still had to offer them.

Dealing with particular masons who became members of the Masons' Company, this chapter draws on the Company's original records deposited at the Guildhall Library. These include the Quarteredge Books, which cover receipts for subscriptions over intermittent periods from 1663, the Court Minutes, starting only when the Company received its Charter in 1677, and the Renter Warden's Accounts, which commence in 1670.<sup>7</sup> The dates of individual Burford Masons achieving the status of Freedom of the City of London are also found in these records, as are details of apprentices taken on by the Company's members.

---

<sup>4</sup> James W.P. Campbell, 'The Carpentry Trade in Seventeenth-Century England', *Georgian Group Journal*, 12 (2002), 215-237.

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Lang, *Pride without Prejudice* (London: Perpetua, 1975); *The Freedom* ed. by Valerie Hope, Olive Birch and Gilbert Torry (Buckingham: Barracuda, 1982); *Livery Companies*.

<sup>6</sup> *Livery Companies*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Guildhall Library, MSS 5313, 5304, 5303/1.

In order to place the Burford Masons' experience in the context of the Masons' Company, this examination starts by looking briefly at the Company evolving from its residual medieval function earlier in the seventeenth century up to the Great Fire. The Company's ensuing accelerated decline, which the Burford Masons witnessed, is then considered. Set against this background, the Burford Masons' involvement with the Company is investigated. Their careers within its organisation are traced from the Company's own records. Motives for their initial and continued commitment to the Company are explored. Various issues arise from this, such as external pressures and inducements for admittance to the Company, and the pragmatic and social incentives to remain active members of it. None of these issues have yet been explored through the experience of a particular group of masons.

## **THE LONDON MASONS' COMPANY IN TRANSITION**

### **Before 1666**

The medieval functions of the various City guilds or livery companies serving the construction industry had, on the whole, survived into the seventeenth century. Those functions largely comprised protecting their monopoly of trade, overseeing standards of workmanship and materials, and providing welfare and legal protection for their members. Clearly these objectives directly benefited the companies' members while serving clients by assuring standards of construction. They also relieved parishes of caring for needy members and their families, as churchwardens' accounts show. This

mutuality had ensured the companies' own survival whilst those needs existed. However, in order to carry out their historic functions, the companies needed to be adequately funded. Their income was sourced from members in the form of fees and subscriptions, and from rents generated from their property investments in the City.<sup>8</sup>

With the expansion of London beyond the City walls, craftsmen were increasingly moving to the suburbs to evade the companies' fees and controls, and the costs of having to become freemen of the City of London in order to trade in the City legally. Details of the sums involved are discussed below. The City authorities, like the companies, were receiving less income as a result, and already by 1632 were unsuccessfully petitioning the Crown for support, claiming that:

the freedom of London which was heretofore of very great esteeme, is grown to be little worth, by reason of the extraordinary enlargement of the suburbs, where great numbers of traders and handicraftsmen doe enjoy without charge, equall benefit with the freemen and citizens of London.<sup>9</sup>

Within the City, the infiltration of building tradesmen not free of the City of London, known as 'foreigners', had been an ongoing challenge to the companies. From the companies' point of view, apart from taking jobs away from their members, the foreigners paid no fees, thus diminishing the companies' income and weakening their control. The London Masons' Company had been seeking to address the question of foreigners since at least the fifteenth century, but by the earlier seventeenth century their recorded concerns

---

<sup>8</sup> T.M.M. Baker, *London: Rebuilding the City after the Great Fire* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> T.F. Reddaway, *The Rebuilding of London after the Great Fire* (London: Cape, 1940), p. 42, citing Nov. 1632, P.C. Reg., 2-42, p. 305.



related particularly to work opportunities at St Paul's Cathedral. In 1622 the Masons' Company petitioned the 'Bishop of London, the Lord Mayor and the Commissioners' that intended work at St Paul's be given to freemen only; twenty years later, the Company even expended money on intended action to prevent foreigners from working there. Cases were also arising in the earlier part of the century of masons becoming free of companies other than the Masons' Company.<sup>10</sup> Not only did the Masons' Company have no control over such masons, but received no income from them either.

Apart from gradual loss of revenue from dwindling membership, the Masons' Company was one of the many which lost significant capital through property speculation in Ulster as a consequence of James I's persistent encouragement to invest there. The Civil War impoverished the Company further, both sides making demands for money, the Company at first lending to the king, and later giving to Cromwell's army. The effect on Minor Companies such as the Masons' was to leave them in dire straits, having to sell off much of their silver and gold plate.<sup>11</sup>

### **After 1666**

The Great Fire compounded the problems the Masons' Company had experienced earlier in the century. Masons' Hall in Hazlewood Alley was one of the forty-four livery halls destroyed by the fire, which the Company rebuilt three years later at a cost of around

---

<sup>10</sup> *London Mason*, pp. 10, 12, 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Lang*, pp. 37, 39.

eight hundred pounds.<sup>12</sup> The fire also wiped out rental income from its investment property in the City, further impoverishing the Company.

However, it was the Rebuilding Act of 1667 which, in responding to the urgent rebuilding needs, seriously undermined the privileged position which the City companies serving the building trades had enjoyed. The Act, as noted in Chapter Three, granted all building craftsmen the same liberty of working whilst they were engaged on the rebuilding as those who had become freemen through the various companies. After having been engaged for seven years on such work, they would 'have and enjoy the same liberty as free men of the city for their natural lives', granting them equal status in their professional practice in the City.<sup>13</sup> Foreign master masons, such as Christopher Kempster and Thomas Strong, could now work legally within the City without joining the Masons' Company. Whilst enjoying the freeman's privilege of working within the City of London as long as the rebuilding lasted, they were not actually granted the freedom of the City itself. As such they were excluded from the Masons' Company and its networking advantages, and from political involvement in the government of the City through Common Hall, the third main court of the City, made up of liverymen.

If they chose, however, foreign master craftsmen could still apply for freedom of the City by 'redemption', a lump sum payment in lieu of serving their apprenticeship in one of the City companies, having served it elsewhere. This sum comprised two elements, one fee payable to the livery company, the other to the City. The City, which had shown itself responsive to the state of trade over the years, reduced its fees for freedom in 1673 to

---

<sup>12</sup> Baker, p. 11; Smith, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Conder, p. 192, citing 18 & 19 Car.II, c.viii.c.xvi.

encourage men of craft and trade back into the City.<sup>14</sup> The Masons' Company, by contrast, raised its admission 'fines' the same year by 50% to thirty-six shillings, presumably in order to recoup some of the financial haemorrhage it was suffering. After this, the total required for admittance and obtaining freedom amounted to around eighty-five shillings, the equivalent of some six weeks' wages for a journeyman, prohibitive for many. Once admitted, masons were obliged to pay significant further fees as they rose through the ranks of the Company, for instance, in order to take livery, a total of eleven pounds was due in addition to the cost of ceremonial clothing.

Edward Strong senior, as one of the biggest employers in the Company, seems to have recognised this obstacle and in 1692 paid the Company's admittance fees for six masons as 'foreign members', a status probably denoting membership of the Company without freedom of the City.<sup>15</sup> As three of those masons are found in Strong's St Paul's team two years later, it is likely that all six were his employees.<sup>16</sup> Not all masters were so generous; by 1690, the Masons' Company seems to have accepted that many foreigners would never join, and raised a token sixpence quarterage money from them instead, to regularise their employment by members of the Company.<sup>17</sup>

Several master masons of importance chose to become members of companies other than the Masons', such as Edward Pierce (whose contract at St Paul's Cathedral Kempster and Beauchamp took over), who was free of the Painter Stainers' Company, whilst other notable mason-contractors at St Paul's, Nathaniel Rawlins and Samuel Fulkes, purchased

---

<sup>14</sup> Reddaway, p. 305.

<sup>15</sup> *London Mason*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, *London Mason*, p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> *London Mason*, pp. 12-14.

their freedom through the Haberdashers' Company.<sup>18</sup> Master masons free of companies other than the Masons' also took on apprentice masons, gradually increasing the number of masons operating outside the Masons' Company. The Masons' Company, in its Search at St Paul's on 26 September 1694, left a record of all those working in five mason-contracting teams, noting each employee's status in relation to the Company.<sup>19</sup> My analysis of this record (Figure 79) reveals among other things that by 1694, some 42% of the mason-contractors' workforce had no connection with the Masons' Company. Whereas the average is a little lower in Strong's team, Kempster and Beauchamp stand out as employing by far the smallest percentage unaffiliated to the Masons' Company, 12% only.

It is not surprising that by the 1690s, the Masons' Company was claiming that it had 'now but few free of their said company in comparison of former times'.<sup>20</sup> By 1694 affiliation to other companies had become so common that the Masons' Company successfully petitioned the City authorities for all apprentices bound to master masons free of other companies to be turned over the Masons' Company instead. Figure 79 illustrates the extent of the problem at St Paul's that year, when an average of 29% of all apprentices in the St Paul's mason-contracting teams were bound to masters not connected with the Masons' Company, although if the Haberdasher Samuel Fulkes's team is excluded, this figure is reduced to 12%. Kempster and Beauchamp were exemplary in having in their team only apprentices indentured through the Mason's Company, whereas Strong's team comprised 6% apprentices bound to masters outside the Company, well below average. The extreme case was Fulkes's workforce, in which none of the apprentices were bound

---

<sup>18</sup> *London Mason*, pp. 14, 25, 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, fols 160<sup>v</sup> - 165<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> *London Mason*, p. 14.

through the Masons' Company, perhaps understandable as Fulkes himself had no connection with it. These statistics show the Burford Masons to have been remarkably compliant with the Company's policy on this issue.

Although apprenticeship was in principle still governed by the Statute of Artificers of 1563, the direct relationship between master and apprentice was breaking down, apprentices being set to work without their masters directly supervising them in contravention of the law.<sup>21</sup> Evidence of this can again be found in the 1694 Search, which identified those apprentices in each team working with or without direct supervision of their masters. Figure 79 brings to light that on average, 28% of apprentices investigated worked without the direct supervision of their apprentice master. The Kempster and Beauchamp team operated in excess of this at 36%, although some of the masters of the apprentices they employed can be found working in other teams at St Paul's. On a site this size, the relevant master did not always supervise his apprentice directly; William Kempster, for instance, employed on the south-west tower in John Thompson's team, could not easily have overseen his son and apprentice Christopher who was engaged in Kempster and Beauchamp's team on the south-east section of the chancel and transept. In this practice, the Burford Masons clearly breached the Company's rules, going with the general trend in opting for more flexible and profitable practices.

This analysis illustrates the Masons' Company gradually losing control over its governance of apprenticeships, a situation which masters such as the Burford Masons used to their advantage.

---

<sup>21</sup> Joan Lane, *Apprenticeship in England* (London: University College London, 1996), p. 2.

The Masons' Company, which had existed as a corporate body by prescription, received its Royal Charter rather late in the day, in 1677, all other companies serving the building trade having long since acquired theirs.<sup>22</sup> This formalised the Company's control over all masons working in the Cities of London and Westminster and seven miles beyond, whether or not they were members of the Company.<sup>23</sup> Despite the Company's newly-acquired powers however, its decline in control and finances continued; by 1694 it was claiming impoverishment, facing almost utter ruin, being 'incapable of assisting poor members and widows as heretofore'.<sup>24</sup>

Several Burford Masons, as noted in the last chapter, took on contracts involving bricklaying as well (Figure 78), strictly a craft governed by the Tylers' and Bricklayers' Company. There is also limited evidence that craftsmen not trained as masons carried out mason's work at this time, a practice termed 'intermeddling'.<sup>25</sup> This does not suggest a sharp delineation of protective trade practices and may have been a continuation of the 'Custom of London' which had tolerated members of one Company carrying out another's trade. Despite the Custom of London applying only to 'marchandizing and trades', but not crafts, a number of examples do exist of this practice among building craftsmen, particularly carpenters.<sup>26</sup> Such erosion of trade boundaries would not have assisted the Masons' Company's cause. The extent of this breakdown is not easy to assess, however; Nicholas Hawksmoor's Building Notebook for instance shows a clear delineation continuing in the later seventeenth century in the various woodworking

---

<sup>22</sup> Smith, p. 10; *Livery Companies*, p. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Smith, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> As summarized by *London Mason*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *London Mason*, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, p. 232.

crafts and types of smith, although no light is shed on the masons' trade.<sup>27</sup> Hawksmoor's practice may not be typical, however, as his Notebook records work for more élite clients, particularly the Crown, Lord Leominster at Easton Neston, and Lord Carlisle at Castle Howard, where long-standing practices may have prevailed.

Ensuring standards of workmanship, construction and materials had been the province of the trade guilds for centuries. Since the early part of the seventeenth century, however, increasing concern over the growth of London had resulted in several attempts to regulate new building construction by legislation, particularly with a view to reducing the spread of fire; at least eight Proclamations between 1602 and 1630 sought to address this.<sup>28</sup> Following the devastation of the Great Fire, the 1667 Act was more successful in regulating standards, as most construction involved new building. Later Acts of 1707 and 1709 augmented the regulation of building construction in London and were strictly enforced by City Surveyors rather than trade companies.<sup>29</sup> Of the Burford Masons, Ephraim Beauchamp took advantage of the increasing centralisation, becoming one of the forty-seven Commissioners of Sewers for Tower Hamlets noted in 1712; he was by then entitled 'esquire', indicating that his appointment was probably not based solely on his craft skills.<sup>30</sup> Despite the Masons' Company's dwindling control over standards of construction, it continued to carry out Searches for defective materials and 'false

---

<sup>27</sup> James W.P. Campbell, 'Nicholas Hawksmoor's Building Notebook', *Construction History*, 20 (2004), 21-44, p. 24.

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Porter, *The Great Fire of London* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996), p. 12

<sup>29</sup> John Summerson, *Georgian London*, rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p. 68; Campbell, p. 220.

<sup>30</sup> Reports of the RCHM, 11, pt 4-5, (London: HMSO, 1887), p. 211, citing the MSS of the Marquess Townshend.

work' (poor workmanship) until 1704, when the last Search is recorded.<sup>31</sup> After seeking legal advice on its position in 1719, the Masons' Company took no further steps that century to enforce its jurisdiction.<sup>32</sup> It is indicative of the Company's continuing decline that Masons' Hall was demolished in 1865 and not rebuilt.<sup>33</sup>

### **REASONS FOR THE BURFORD MASONS' INVOLVEMENT WITH THE COMPANY**

Foreign masons who arrived in London after the Great Fire were not required to become members of the London Masons' Company and were legally free from its controls. Yet Christopher Kempster and Thomas Strong saw fit to purchase their freedom of the Masons' Company by redemption in 1670, on 4 August and 15 September respectively (Figure 80).<sup>34</sup> The juxtaposition of the serious decline of the Masons' Company with the considerable commitment of the Burford Masons to it, begs the question as to why the Burford Masons took the trouble to become involved with the Company, remain involved with it, even invest in it, and spend valuable time serving as its officers, when they could have concentrated on increasing their income from construction. This chapter now considers their possible motives, starting by looking at why the first Burford Masons chose the path of admittance in 1670.

---

<sup>31</sup> *London Mason*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Baker, p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> GL, MS 5313.



### **Pressure to comply through harassment**

It was seen above that the monopoly of trade which the City companies had legally, if not entirely in practice, enjoyed for centuries was suddenly extinguished by the Rebuilding Act in 1667. This was met with resentment; already in May that year, the City had to order that actions should not be brought against foreigners working on the rebuilding in accordance with the new legislation, and those actions which had already been brought were to be withdrawn without penalty.<sup>35</sup> In spite of this, two years later, the Masons' Company joined forces with the Companies of the Carpenters, Tylers and Bricklayers, Joiners and Plasterers in a petition to the Court of Aldermen seeking to exclude foreigners from contracts in the City.<sup>36</sup> The outcome is unrecorded, but the action indicates ongoing resistance of City craftsmen to foreigners.

The Masons' Company continued to pressurise foreign masons, making enquiries into their credentials, particularly seeking satisfaction that they had completed their apprenticeship elsewhere.<sup>37</sup> Whilst exposing the unqualified to prosecution, this practice interfered with the proper working of those foreigners who were master masons. This was carried out by searches, when officers of the Company, usually the Wardens, paid unannounced visits to known building sites in the City to ascertain the status of men working as masons. The Company then sought to coerce those working in contravention of the Company's regulations into membership. Their methods proved at times successful, as already in 1678, when Thomas Strong was found to be employing at least four foreigners in his team of thirty-five at St Paul's, the foreigners subsequently

---

<sup>35</sup> Reddaway, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Conder, p. 191.

<sup>37</sup> Reddaway, p. 304.

requesting admittance as foreign members.<sup>38</sup> One of the foreigners in Strong's team, however, Nathaniel Rawlins, was already free of the Haberdashers' Company, so this number may not be entirely representative. Searches for 'false work' were similarly used to beleaguer those on building sites.<sup>39</sup>

Foreign master masons who had already invested time and money in their business in the City, like Strong and Kempster, would have found such molestation at best a hindrance to carrying out their work, but more seriously a threat to their future business. Unlike most masons, they also wanted to sell their own stone, which would have been an additional motive to secure their future safe operation in view of its potential profitability.

Consolidating their position by becoming free of the Masons' Company would have placed them outside its harassment, eliminating this uncertainty.

### **Opportunities for new contracts opened up in 1670**

It was apparent from the second Rebuilding Act, passed on 11 April 1670, that many more contracts would shortly become available for building craftsmen in the City. The number of churches which were to be rebuilt and funded under the Act had risen from the thirty-nine quoted in 1667 to fifty-one. Masons particularly would have seen this as their unique opportunity, since apart from company halls and public buildings, the majority of which were already underway, most of the City was being rebuilt in brick, but it was likely that at least some of the fifty-one churches would be rebuilt with stone. It is telling

---

<sup>38</sup> *London Mason*, p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> Reddaway, p. 116.

that during the first half of 1670, when the extent of potential new masonry contracts became evident, harassment intensified.<sup>40</sup>

To those masons with stone to sell from their own quarries, the business opportunities would have seemed even more lucrative. The fact that Kempster obtained his freedom of the Mason's Company only four months after the second Rebuilding Act was passed, and Strong a month later, indicates their high motivation to become involved in the imminent church building programme. On one day alone in October 1670, thirteen masons obtained their freedom by redemption.<sup>41</sup> For some three years there was a steady stream of applicants; in the year 1673-4, the City companies admitted 194 foreign building craftsmen.<sup>42</sup> It would appear that the harassment inflicted upon foreigners since 1667 had reaped rewards.

Despite Strong and Kempster obtaining their freedom in 1670, all the first twenty contracts for rebuilding City churches were let to London masons, as was demonstrated in Chapter Three (Figure 34). This shows a preference for masons who were already known in the City; it might equally be evidence of ongoing discrimination against foreigners, even though they might since have become free of the Masons' Company. The contract which Strong and Kempster were awarded, two years after becoming free, was on riskier terms, being on the extraordinary.

As it turned out, the total payments for Edward Strong and Kempster's work on City churches indicate that their decision to become free of the Masons' Company stood them

---

<sup>40</sup> Reddaway, p. 117.

<sup>41</sup> *London Mason*, p. 15.

<sup>42</sup> Reddaway, p. 304.

in good stead. Edward Strong received over £15,000 for his work on City churches, Kempster over £8,600, both excluding their joint payment of almost £4,500 for St Stephen Walbrook.<sup>43</sup> The success of the two pioneering Burford Masons paved the way for many others of their families, particularly Thomas Strong's brother Edward, brother-in-law Ephraim Beauchamp, and Christopher Kempster's son William, who subsequently became contractors for rebuilding City churches and St Paul's, having purchased their freedom through the Company.

The 1667 Act had effectively granted freemen's rights to those master craftsmen engaged on the rebuilding either in perpetuity when they had worked on the rebuilding for seven years, or until the rebuilding was 'fully finished'.<sup>44</sup> The criteria for identifying the state of 'fully finished' were not defined, however. In view of the ambiguity, ambitious foreign masons might well have chosen the cautious route of membership of the Masons' Company for similar reasons to Christopher Kempster and Thomas Strong.

### **Use of apprentices**

After 1684, almost all other Burford Masons who were admitted to the Masons' Company did so by first becoming apprenticed in the City, arrangements for this no doubt made by their relatives already there, the first family apprentice being John Strong to his brother Thomas as early as 1671.<sup>45</sup> At least thirteen members of the Strong, Kempster, and Beauchamp families became apprenticed through the London Masons' Company (Figure 81).

---

<sup>43</sup> KJ, *The Mediaeval Mason*, 3rd edn, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 181.

<sup>44</sup> Conder, p. 192, citing 18 & 19 Car.II, c.viii, c.xvi.

<sup>45</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, fol.42.

Serving an apprenticeship in the City of London at a time when construction skills were in great demand, and when new styles and techniques were being introduced, was an attractive proposition for those from town and country alike, producing a strong demand for apprenticeships in the London livery companies. Like applications for redemption, the number of apprenticeship bindings recorded by the Masons' Company shows a striking increase in 1670, when the City church rebuilding programme began in earnest.<sup>46</sup> The origin and number of apprentices bound to individual Burford Masons can be seen in Figure 82, which shows a steady demand for apprenticeships, given that at any one time, a master mason was permitted only two apprentices, or three if the master had served as Warden twice. When a master died before his apprentice was out of his indentures, the apprentice was 'turned over' to another master who at the time was below his permitted complement. Individual Burford Masons took on 'turned over' apprentices to augment their apprentice numbers. It can be seen from the same Figure that around half of the total Burford Masons' apprentices in London were drawn from the provinces, some from as far afield as Staffordshire, Dorset, and Essex, indicating a considerable attraction in serving a City apprenticeship with these master masons. As might be expected, over half of those provincial apprentices originated from the Burford area, some of whom were family members, others coming from diverse backgrounds, their fathers variously being husbandmen, tailors, maltsters, and clothiers. Many are not traced in London after serving their apprenticeship, and may have returned home with their newly-acquired skills. With time, the Burford Masons increasingly drew their apprentices from the London area. Two such apprentices, Edward Tufnell who was apprenticed to Christopher Kempster, and

---

<sup>46</sup> GL, MS 5313.

Andrews Jelfe, Edward Strong junior's apprentice, were to remain in London and form partnerships with Edward Strong junior.

The benefit to the master of taking on apprentices could be great. The master received a modest premium of up to ten pounds to take on the apprentice.<sup>47</sup> The master was required to pay an Apprentice Fee of 2s. 6d. to the Masons' Company, and provide board, lodging, and clothing for him during the seven years of his indentures.<sup>48</sup> Apprenticeship provided the master with free labour for around twelve hours a day, usually 6 am to 6 pm.<sup>49</sup>

Initially, this would be of minimal value as the apprentice would require much guidance, but later the apprentice's earning capacity would be significant. Where the master was a mason-contractor, his more advanced apprentice saved him the cost of skilled labour; a master paid by the day would charge his client real money for the apprentice's work. The more advanced apprentice represented real financial advantage for the master, up to forty pounds per annum, according to some contemporary accounts.<sup>50</sup> The extent to which the Burford Masons used apprentices at St Paul's can be seen by the analysis of the 1694 Search (Figure 79). Whereas the average team comprised 32% apprentices, Kempster and Beauchamp employed 44% apprentices, by far the largest percentage on site. Such cheap apprentice labour was legally only possible in the City for masters free of the Masons' Company.

---

<sup>47</sup> R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman* (London: T. Gardner, 1747; repr. Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1969), p. 336

<sup>48</sup> Smith, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> Lane, p. 97; Malcolm Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995) p. 171.

<sup>50</sup> Earle, p. 358, citing Mayor's Court, Interrogatories 68, CLRO.

## Social status

Despite the gradual relative impoverishment of the Masons' Company, Robert Campbell was writing in 1747 that the London master mason still 'ranked among the first Rank of Tradesmen'. He deemed stonemasonry 'an ingenious genteel Craft, and not unprofitable'.<sup>51</sup>

Edward Strong senior's epitaph in St Peter's church, St Albans (Figure 83), and Ephraim Beauchamp's in All Saints, Tottenham (Figure 84), proclaim both men to be a 'Citizen and Mason of London'. Following on Christopher Kempster's name on his wall memorial in Burford parish church run the words 'Freeman of the City of London and of y<sup>e</sup> Company of Masons' (Figure 75). William Kempster's daybooks reveal William to have drafted the additional phrase 'twice Master of his Company', an achievement which William as a member of that Company himself clearly esteemed, but the phrase was ultimately excluded from Christopher's inscription.<sup>52</sup> Membership of the Masons' Company, and the Freedom or Citizenship of London derived through it, was clearly held in high regard by the dynasties' respective families, many of whose members were also masons.

All three of these Burford Masons had served as Masters of the Company, in the case of Christopher Kempster twice. Each of the eleven mason-contractors at St Paul's belonging to the Masons' Company held this position at some time, with the exception of Thomas Strong, who died prematurely, and Jasper Latham, who died after reaching the position of

---

<sup>51</sup> R. Campbell, p. 158.

<sup>52</sup> KvW.

Warden.<sup>53</sup> These were busy men already, making significant money on their contracts and other enterprises, yet willing to forego valuable time and money in serving as Master. This strongly indicates that the Company was still considered to have residual status.

Whilst the craft functions of the Company declined, the role of Master does not appear to have become any less prestigious. The position of Master could only be held by those with substantial financial resources, those becoming Upper Warden 'at length would, if in prosperous circumstances, proceed to fill the chair'.<sup>54</sup> The Company's court minutes record costly dinners held at the Master's, and Warden's, expense.<sup>55</sup> In view of the expense involved, Christopher Kempster agreeing to hold the position of Master twice gives some indication of its value to him, also reflecting on the esteem in which his peers held him.

As only freemen were able to hold civic office in the City, the livery companies through which freedom could be obtained were sometimes viewed as a stepping-stone to a political career.<sup>56</sup> None of the Burford Masons, however, pursued this avenue, unlike their contemporaries John Townesend of Oxford or Francis Smith of Warwick, both of whom became actively involved in provincial politics, attaining high civic office.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, Edward Strong junior, having been elected to the office of Sheriff of the City of London and County of Middlesex in 1728, declined to accept, resulting in a fine of over

---

<sup>53</sup> *London Mason*, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Conder, p. 140.

<sup>55</sup> GL, MS 5304/1.

<sup>56</sup> Adrian Tinniswood, *By Permission of Heaven* (London: Pimlico, 2004), pp. 4-5; *Livery Companies*, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Dictionary*, pp. 1045, 940.



four hundred pounds.<sup>58</sup> In March 1686 members of the London Masons' Company were approached to sign the 'Solemn Oath' in support of King James. They refused to do so, twenty-one masons including Edward Strong senior and Christopher Kempster putting their names to their declaration of refusal (Figure 85).<sup>59</sup> The fact that the Company was approached in this way, and that its members felt independent enough to refuse the king's request, indicates that the Company was still self-confident and considered itself of high status. By contrast, ten years later, the same Edward Strong, together with two other Stronges, three Kempsters, and Ephraim Beauchamp, all signed the Association Oath of loyalty to William III, in common with most Protestants who were invited to subscribe.<sup>60</sup>

### **Opportunities for networking within the Company**

The importance of networking as a means of obtaining contracts was explored in Chapter Four. The Masons' Company opened up a further avenue for cultivating influential contacts that could lead to commissions, known as the 'Acception'.

In the seventeenth century, coinciding with the increasing number of gentlemen interested in architecture, a separate classification of 'Acception' coexisted with, or possibly in, the Masons' Company.<sup>61</sup> In the Company's earliest surviving account books, payments from Accepted masons can be traced intermittently from the 1620s through to 1677.<sup>62</sup> The Acception comprised both 'operative members' of the Company, such as the

---

<sup>58</sup> *Country Journal or The Craftsman*, 29 June, 1728, p. 2; *Daily Journal*, 12 July 1734, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> GL, MS 5333.

<sup>60</sup> *Index to the Association Oath Rolls for the City of London 1696*, ed. by Cliff Webb (Woking: West Surrey Family History Records, 2006), pp. 9, 67, 112.

<sup>61</sup> *AQC*, 9 (1896), p. 37.

<sup>62</sup> Conder, p. 155.

master mason Nicholas Stone, and non-operative or 'speculative members', comprising gentlemen unskilled in construction crafts. Entry to the Acception by operative masons appears to have been limited to members of the Masons' Company, who could be admitted for the sum of £1; for 'strangers', or speculative members, the fee was £2.<sup>63</sup> These sums were paid to the Masons' Company, which provided a banquet for Accepted members and controlled their funds, strongly indicating that the Company had control over the Acception. The Acception appears to have attracted strangers of high calibre, such as the antiquary and Fellow of the Royal Society Elias Ashmole, who attended an Acception Lodge held at Masons' Hall in 1682.<sup>64</sup> According to John Aubrey, Sir Christopher Wren was admitted as an Accepted mason in 1691.<sup>65</sup> The opportunity to network with potential clients and knowledgeable gentlemen no doubt attracted aspiring members of the Masons' Company to join, such as master masons Thomas and William Wise, William Stanton, and John Thompson, all of whom Ashmole noted as members in 1682.<sup>66</sup> There is no evidence in the Company's fragmentary records of the Acception, however, that any of the Burford Masons were members, but as major mason-contractors in London, their involvement is most likely.

Whether or how Accepted masonry and the growth of Freemasonry through the seventeenth century were connected has not been established, although Conder firmly considered the Acception to have been a forerunner of modern Freemasonry, the first

---

<sup>63</sup> Smith, p. 17; Douglas Knoop, 'Connection between Operative and Speculative Masonry', *AQC*, 45 (1935), p. 36.

<sup>64</sup> *Ashmole's Diary*, ed. by R.T. Gunther (Oxford: Old Ashmolean Reprints II, 1927), p. 119.

<sup>65</sup> Conder, p. 5, citing a manuscript in Aubrey's hand dated 1691.

<sup>66</sup> Gunther, p. 119.

Grand Lodge of which was formed in 1717.<sup>67</sup> The Acception appears to have run on, however, as in 1732 the *Daily Journal* recorded a meeting of the 'Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons' at the Devil Tavern in Fleet Street.<sup>68</sup> Using a tavern as a meeting place suggests that links with the Masons' Company had weakened by then. The earlier association of the Acception and the Masons' Company also shows that the Company's status was deemed sufficiently high for gentlemen to choose to associate with.

### **THE BURFORD MASONS' COMMITMENT TO THE LONDON MASONS' COMPANY**

The first five Burford Masons to obtain their freedom did so by redemption. In 1680 John Strong was the first Burford Mason to obtain freedom by 'servitude', meaning by apprenticeship in the City, in his case with his brother Thomas.<sup>69</sup> Most of the later Burford Masons gained their freedom in this way, although William Kempster's younger son William, born the son of a freeman, became free by 'patrimony', without the need of formal apprenticeship. Despite choosing this method of entry, William junior appears to have been a skilled mason, his name appearing in his father's daybooks amongst the workforce.<sup>70</sup> As it turned out, those first Burford Masons who purchased their freedom in 1670 instigated a multiplier effect, enabling many members of their families to follow. Whereas Thomas Strong and Christopher Kempster may also have had their immediate

---

<sup>67</sup> Conder, p. 13. This thesis does not explore Freemasonry. Further information can be found in John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry* (n.p.: Crucible, 1986).

<sup>68</sup> *AQC*, 46 (1937), p. 444.

<sup>69</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, fol. 42.

<sup>70</sup> KvW.

family in mind in becoming freemen, they could scarcely have envisaged the ultimate scale of their response.

Once a mason was admitted as a freeman in the Company, he could rise into the Livery, from which he could be one of the twenty-four elected for life to the Court of Assistants. Higher offices such as Rent(n)er Warden (Lower Warden), Upper Warden, and Master were elected annually.<sup>71</sup> Figure 86 illustrates the structure of the Company's establishment, which I have compiled from a number of sources. Within a year, both Christopher Kempster and Thomas Strong had been admitted into the Livery, and within five years Strong was elected to the Court of Assistants.<sup>72</sup> Thomas Strong's early death in 1681 cut short his rise to the higher ranks of Renter Warden, Upper Warden, and Master, a course later achieved by five other Burford Masons.

The careers of the individual Burford Masons in the Masons' Company are set out in Figure 81. Omissions of data may be the result of incomplete records, or the particular mason not pursuing a career within the Company. John Strong for instance returned to the provinces after obtaining his freedom in 1680 working on London Bridge; Thomas Hands appears to have lived outside the City after completing his apprenticeship. Neither would have needed to remain in the Company, particularly if they had no ambition to take contracts in the Cities of London or Westminster. What is certain, however, is that no less than nineteen Burford Masons were either apprenticed through the Masons' Company, or admitted by other means.

---

<sup>71</sup> Smith, p. 11.

<sup>72</sup> GL, MS 5303/1, fol. 261.

Christopher Kempster, the first Burford Mason to join the Company, was also the first to be elected Master, unusually holding the office twice, in 1691 and 1700. Over the hundred years' research period, only one mason exceeded that achievement, Abraham Storey, who held the office three times.<sup>73</sup> The Masons' Company's record of Kempster's election in 1700 can be seen in Figure 87, the year his son William was also elected Renter Warden, and his son Edmund admitted to the Livery.<sup>74</sup> When William Kempster subsequently became Master in 1705, he won his election against the competing nominees of his father and Edward Strong senior.<sup>75</sup> As only three candidates were permitted to stand, this is likely to be an example of Burford Masons continuing to support each other. At least one Burford Mason would have been elected: Christopher Kempster, who was already seventy-eight, Strong, aged fifty-three, or William, fifty-four.

The Burford Masons not only served through the honorary high ranks of the Company, but also as its paid officers. The position of Treasurer of the Company was held by Christopher Kempster in 1687, and by Edward Strong senior in 1693, who did not resign until 1716.<sup>76</sup> Surviving papers connected with Strong's office demonstrate that the position of Treasurer was not a sinecure.<sup>77</sup> Later in the eighteenth century, the office of Beadle was held by Edward's great nephew John when already a pensioner of the Company. The Beadle acted as the Company's clerk and constable, one of his minor duties being to ensure the Company was kept in pipes and tobacco.<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Smith, p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> GL, MS 5303/1, fol. 43<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>75</sup> GL, MS 5304/2, fol. 74.

<sup>76</sup> GL, MSS 5304/1.

<sup>77</sup> GL, MS 5322.

<sup>78</sup> Conder, p. 265; *Livery Companies*, p. 8.

As well as taking on high office, individual Burford Masons have also been found to have supported the Company financially, by donations and loans. In 1684, Christopher and William Kempster, and Edward Strong were among those who donated money to the Company to defray the costs of seeking a second charter, Strong giving five pounds, Christopher Kempster four, and William, not yet a mason-contractor, one pound.<sup>79</sup>

Although these were modest sums compared with the ten pounds donated each by the more established masons Thomas Wise, William Stanton, and John Thompson, they do testify to Strong's and the Kempsters' belief in the purpose of the Company, albeit perhaps also to their motivation of buying into social networks. In 1691, Edward Strong, Ephraim Beauchamp and Christopher Kempster all gave 'free gifts' to the Company of up to five pounds, Kempster making another donation four years later of £5 2s. 6d.<sup>80</sup> All these financial commitments underline their espousal of the Company's cause.

In total, at least eleven Stronges were attached to the Masons' Company, six Kempsters (including a future son-in-law), and two Beauchamps. Several remained active members until they died. Christopher Kempster, the only Burford Mason with a London business who effectively remained domiciled in Burford, was sufficiently committed to the Company to continue attending its meetings in London until he was eighty-three.<sup>81</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The decline of the Masons' Company as a trade guild has been analysed through the experience of the Burford Masons. It was shown to manifest itself in the employment of

---

<sup>79</sup> GL, MS 5304/1, fol. 84.

<sup>80</sup> GL, MS 5303/1.

<sup>81</sup> GL, MS 5304/2, fol. 33.

maisons unaffiliated with the Company, and in the related erosion of trade boundaries, for example stonemasons branching out into bricklaying. Supervision of apprentices was found to be relaxing, facilitating their flexible deployment, more profitable to the master. These changes served to weaken the hold of the Company on its members and on its control over standards of workmanship. Yet in all three cases, the Burford Masons went along with these modernising trends, in spite of being staunch supporters of the Company.

A number of reasons were identified to explain the Burford Masons' close association with the Company. By joining, they avoided the widespread practice of harassment which caused operational discomfort and business insecurity. The timing of their application for membership indicates that the prospect of a large number of City church rebuilding contracts was a significant incentive, especially for masons with their own stone to sell.

Their ongoing commitment was found to be further motivated by opportunities for networking, and by promising social status. Having documented the careers of the Burford Masons in the Company for the first time, they were shown to have risen through the ranks of its medieval hierarchy with no less than five Burford Masons holding the office of Master. The Company's standing was still sufficiently high to provide opportunities to mix in influential circles, potentially profitable for these élite masons, who aspired to prestigious commissions. The Company also offered the incentive to aspiring apprentices of obtaining freedom, which kept the Burford Masons well supplied with apprentices, providing them with free labour.

At least thirteen members of the Burford Masons were identified as being apprenticed through the Company. Although over half of the provincial apprentices which the Burford Masons took on originated from their home area, they also exerted a strong pull on other parts of the country. This educational element was part of what constituted the Burford Masons as a school, also manifesting itself later in disseminating new ideas to the provinces, which will be considered in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### THE BURFORD MASONS AS TRANSLATORS OF DESIGN

#### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most significant development to affect the working practices of master masons during the research period was the emergence of a new persona in the construction process: the architect. Master masons, who had continued in their medieval tradition of both designing and constructing buildings, found the design function increasingly assumed by men of gentle birth, unskilled in the building crafts but informed about the new styles originating from the continent.

In order to realise their designs, the incoming architects had to rely on the skills of the craftsman. This chapter explores this interaction through the experience of the Burford Masons with architects such as Sir Christopher Wren, Hugh May, Nicholas Hawksmoor, and Sir John Vanbrugh, whose designs they translated and executed. It also investigates the Burford Masons' activity in their traditional role as designers of their own buildings.

The rise of the architect in England has been examined in detail in the literature and need not be explored here.<sup>1</sup> The role of the mason as designer in the early modern period,

---

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to *Dictionary*, and John Wilton-Ely, 'The Rise of the Professional Architect in England' in *The Architect: Chapters in the History of the Profession*, ed. by Spiro Kostof (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 57-95.

however, has received significantly less attention, not least due to the paucity of evidence.

Of particular relevance to the research period is Howard Colvin's Introduction to his *Dictionary* which traces the rise of the architectural profession in the seventeenth century, examining the role of the building trades in the design process, particularly masons, bricklayers, and carpenters.<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Airs investigated the design process in Tudor and Jacobean times, noting the emergence of professional designing craftsmen from the end of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The part played by the mason in design after the arrival of the architect in England was explored by Elizabeth Chew, looking particularly at the master mason Nicholas Stone (c.1587-1647) and the degree of his design autonomy as distinct from Inigo Jones, the first English architect in the Renaissance sense.<sup>4</sup> Chew identified the advantages to clients of employing Stone in the capacity of architect. Giles Worsley, in his chapter 'No Lonely Genius: Inigo Jones and his contemporaries', explored the designing role of both architect and mason, going on to look at working practices such as the making of models.<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Kingsley, focusing on country houses in Gloucestershire, sought to identify master craftsmen responsible for the design of particular buildings, including three known cases of the Strong's involvement: Lower

---

<sup>2</sup> *Dictionary*.

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Airs, *The Tudor & Jacobean Country House: A Building History* (Stroud: Sutton, 1995), p. 46.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Chew, 'A Mockery of the Surveyor's Style? Alternatives to Inigo Jones in Seventeenth-Century Elite British Architecture', in *Articulating British Classicism*, ed. by Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 57-95.

<sup>5</sup> Giles Worsley, *Classical Architecture in Britain: the Heroic Age* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995).

Slaughter Manor House, Sherborne House, and Fairford Park, none of which appears to have involved architects.<sup>6</sup>

Focusing on particular masons' skills, both John Summerson and Anthony Geraghty considered the 'Kempster' drawing, which this chapter analyses in greater detail.<sup>7</sup>

Anthony Gerbino and Stephen Johnson, and Airs, looked at the craftsman's skills of draughtsmanship and model-making, which my study examines from the Burford Masons' experience with a view to shedding light on the degree to which the architect relied upon their expertise.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter again relies heavily on contemporary building accounts, particularly those kept by the commissions for the City churches and St Paul's Cathedral, and institutions such as Christ Church College and Trinity College, Oxford, the College of Arms, London, and Abingdon Borough Council, Berkshire. Records found in the Oxfordshire and Worcestershire Record Offices and Gloucestershire Archives have been particularly relevant to this study, for instance in connection with Christopher Kempster's Perrott aisle, North Leigh, Oxfordshire, a notable example of design and execution combined in one hand.

---

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Kingsley, *The Country Houses of Gloucestershire Volume One 1500-1660* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> 'Drawings of London Churches in the Bute Collection: A Catalogue', *Architectural History*, 13 (1970), 30-42 and 93-118; *The Architectural Drawings of Sir Christopher Wren at All Souls College, Oxford: A Complete Catalogue* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Compass and Rule: Architecture and Mathematical Practice in England 1500-1750* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009).

This investigation starts with an examination of masons' traditional skills, and the extent to which the architect relied on that expertise in the Burford Masons. It looks at how the architect's demands extended their skill base. It considers the role of designer, traditionally one of the skills of the mason, and the advantage of foreign travel and literature in exposing the designer to new ideas. The continuing role of the Burford Masons as mason-architects is examined by reference to buildings confidently attributable to their design. The authorship of County Hall, Abingdon, is discussed as a case study. Finally, their influence as transmitters of style in the provinces is explored.

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN MASONS' SKILL BASE

For the medieval mason, proficiency in mathematics, geometry and drawing was pre-requisite in order particularly to cope with the demands of Gothic structures and decoration. These skills equipped the mason to design, measure, provide plans and templates, and make decisions on structural matters.<sup>9</sup> The tracing floors in the cathedrals of York and Wells reflect these activities, as does the writing of the twelfth-century monk Gervase of Canterbury, observing the work of William of Sens.<sup>10</sup> Mark Girouard noted these skills continuing in importance through Elizabethan and Jacobean times.<sup>11</sup> By the late sixteenth century, the use of scale, perspective, and isometric projections in masons'

---

<sup>9</sup> Gerbino and Johnston, pp. 17-21.

<sup>10</sup> Nicola Coldstream, *Medieval Craftsmen: Masons and Sculptors* (London: British Museum, 1998), p. 15

<sup>11</sup> *Elizabethan Architecture: Its Rise and Fall, 1540-1640* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 35-46.

drawings illustrates the development of their skills.<sup>12</sup> The medieval mason also procured stone, and was equipped to measure the work of others.

Contemporary literature reflects the continued requirement of these masons' skills in the early modern period. Geometry and measurement, for instance, were considered of such ongoing importance that by 1656, eighteen editions of the manual of measurement *Tectonicon* by Leonard Digges had been published.<sup>13</sup> By 1747, *The London Tradesman*, describing the skills required for each craft, noted that the mason 'must have so much Judgment as to take in a large Compass of Figures; Geometry is absolutely necessary'.<sup>14</sup> Despite the emergence of the architect, drawing and design continued to be vital skills of the mason, as evidenced in trade handbooks which were increasingly coming into circulation later in the seventeenth century. Joseph Moxon, for instance, wrote in 1683, 'there be many Master Workmen that will contrive a Building, and draw the Designs thereof, as well, and as curiously, as most Surveyors: Yea, some of them will do it better than some Surveyors'.<sup>15</sup> Twenty years later, *The City and Countrey Purchaser* observed that the master workman was 'sometimes taken for the Surveyor of a Building' in his designing and supervisory role.<sup>16</sup> The terms 'surveyor' and 'architect' were almost synonymous at this time.<sup>17</sup> In 1747, Robert Campbell still included designing as one of

---

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry 1480-1680* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Gerbino and Johnston, pp. 45-49.

<sup>14</sup> R. Campbell, *The London Tradesman* (London: Gardner, 1747, repr. Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1969), p. 158.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercices, or The Doctrine of Handy-Works* (London: n.pub., 1683), p. 252.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Neve, *The City and Countrey Purchaser, and Builder's Dictionary: Or, The Compleat Builders Guide* (London: n.pub., 1703), p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 19.

the skills necessary for a stonemason, stipulating 'he must learn Designing, and to draw all the five Orders of Architecture', and 'without Drawing and Figures he cannot make a Stone-Mason, unless he is to be employed only in cutting and sawing Flag-Stones'.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that the master mason continued to be well-versed in technical aspects of design long after the appearance of the architect in this country. This chapter will now look at particular skills which the architect required of the Burford Masons in the design process.

### **Traditional masons' skills which the architect relied upon**

#### ***Preparing drawings***

Several types of drawings can be identified in the design process: the freehand sketch; measured survey drawings of existing land or buildings, establishing exact dimensions for design and construction work; presentation drawings, illustrating a concept to the client; and detailed, working drawings, to scale, for use by both architect and craftsman during construction.

Wren's collaborative approach to the preparation of drawings has been acknowledged for some time, colleagues in his office such as Robert Hooke or Nicholas Hawksmoor frequently carrying out the task.<sup>19</sup> Some drawing also appears to have been delegated to

---

<sup>18</sup> Campbell, p. 158.

<sup>19</sup> Kerry Downes, *Sir Christopher Wren: The Design of St Paul's Cathedral* (London: Trefoil Publications, in association with the Guildhall Library, 1988), p. 29.

able craftsmen, for instance to the mason-contractor Edward Pierce, to whom drawings of at least two City churches and details at St Paul's Cathedral are attributed by Anthony Geraghty and Gordon Higgott.<sup>20</sup> Geraghty also notes instances of Pierce acting as Robert Hooke's draughtsman.

One fascinating drawing survived in the collection of antiquities and drawings which Wren's son Christopher inherited from his father. It indicates most strongly that a Burford Mason was also called upon to prepare drawings for the City church campaign.<sup>21</sup> It came to light among the Bute Collection sold at Sotheby's, London, in 1951, when it was purchased by Reginald Cooper, a Nottingham architect, but is now lost.<sup>22</sup> However, it can still be examined from photographic records made prior to the sale and now held in the Conway Library of the Courtauld Institute. The drawing deserves closer scrutiny, as several issues arise from it.

### *The Kempster Drawing: a case study*

The drawing is clearly a ground plan of a church (Figure 88). It was catalogued in the sale as 'unidentified church', but acquired the identification label 'St Bennets Pauls Wharf' on both recto and verso, presumably when the collection was photographed. This attribution repeats the words (and spelling) inscribed on the verso in a stronger ink and

---

<sup>20</sup> Geraghty, p. 86; 'The Revised Design for St Paul's Cathedral 1685-90: Wren, Hawksmoor and Les Invalides', *Burlington Magazine*, 146 (August 2004), 533-547.

<sup>21</sup> Geraghty, pp. 86, 87.

<sup>22</sup> As confirmed to the author by Charles Hind of the RIBA collection of drawings at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

more modern hand than other writings on the sheet. The attribution is incorrect, however, as the nave or auditorium on the drawing is significantly more elongated than that of St Benet's, either before the Fire or as rebuilt. To the right of the caption on the recto are the words 'Labour in Vain Hill', identifying the church correctly as St Mary Somerset, located on the street of that name now known as Old Fish Street Hill.<sup>23</sup>

As the tower is located on the north side of the church, this plan appears to record the earlier St Mary Somerset, most of which was burnt in 1666. The Commission for rebuilding the City churches prepared survey drawings of around half the churches which had been destroyed in the Great Fire, using their officers William Walgrave and Henry Hunt until 1677. Of the other half, St Mary Somerset was one of the poorest parishes in the City, not rebuilt until the mid-1680s, unable even to afford the interior fittings for its new church.<sup>24</sup> As a result of its impoverished position, the parish may have been less demanding, and certainly less prestigious, warranting less attention by Wren in the church's rebuilding. The draughtsmanship of the survey drawing is not of the usual sophisticated standard of the Wren office, leading Summerson, who catalogued the collection, to conclude that 'the crudity of the plan makes any connection with Wren's office unlikely'.<sup>25</sup> The question arises as to the authorship of the drawing, particularly as Christopher Kempster was the mason-contractor for the church's rebuilding.

---

<sup>23</sup> H. Harben, *Dictionary of London* (London: Jenkins, 1918), p. 337.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Jeffery, *The City Churches of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: Hambledon, 1996), pp. 289, 73, 152.

<sup>25</sup> John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, 9th edn, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 42.



Geraghty dates the drawing to between May 1685, when the parishioners visited Wren, and April 1686, when the bricklayer's contract was let.<sup>26</sup> No contract has survived for Kempster's work, but by July 1686, he had demolished the walls of the old church, and dug new foundations.<sup>27</sup>

The plan on the recto appears to have been executed in ink, with fainter, locational annotations of 'Church yard' and 'Building' (both occurring twice), 'Ministers House', and 'Labour in Vain Hill', seemingly written in pencil in a neat, sloping hand. Geraghty, who has examined drawings of the Wren office extensively, considers the handwriting to be Hawksmoor's.<sup>28</sup> Certainly the formation of the letter 'd' at the end of words is typically his, and the word 'yard' on this plan appears almost identical to that on Hawksmoor's heavily-annotated plan of 'The Basilica after the Primitive Christians' in Lambeth Palace Library.<sup>29</sup> William Kempster's handwriting in his daybooks, however, is not dissimilar and also uses a backward-sloping tail to the letter 'd'.

Several inscriptions can also be distinguished on the verso (Figure 89). The photograph shows marks of the plan having been folded and addressed to: 'Mr Thomas Cornweall | in Burford in Oxfordshier | Those p<sup>r</sup>:sent'. The name 'Thomas Cornewell' appears again on the verso. The words 'Will Kempster' are written twice, apparently in the same hand, similar to William's in his daybooks. Faint numerical figures, and a detailed profile,

---

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Geraghty, 'New Light on the Wren City Churches: The Evidence of the All Souls and Bute Drawings' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1999), p. 137.

<sup>27</sup> GL, MS 25,539/4.

<sup>28</sup> Personal comment from author's conversation with Anthony Geraghty, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Illustrated in Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, *Hawksmoor's London Churches* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 63, citing LPL MS 2750/16.

apparently of a capital and column base of the Tuscan order, can be distinguished on the same side.

Burford parish records did not turn up any name resembling Thomas Cornweall, although the Civil War and Commonwealth, during which he may have been born, interrupted registrations.<sup>30</sup> My investigations have led to a will of a Thomas Cornewall, mason, who worked for Queen Anne (and had not been fully paid by 1708).<sup>31</sup> A Thomas Cornbell, 'foreigner', was named as one of Edward Strong's team at St Paul's in the 1694 Masons' Company search, who may well be the same Cornweall/Cornewall in Burford eight years earlier, possibly working for the Strong's or the Kempsters.<sup>32</sup> Christopher Kempster apprenticed a Richard Cornell from Blockley, Worcestershire, in 1674, who may have been a relative. All this would support the drawing having been sent by the Kempsters to Burford with a view to engaging Cornweall/Cornewall/Cornbell/Cornell as foreman or supervisor for the forthcoming rebuilding of St Mary Somerset.

A further inscription on the verso presents itself in a neat, sloping, hand, reading: 'Wherefore do the heathen say, Where is now thy god'. Summerson picked out the first four words, assuming the rest to have been deleted, but the shadow over these words, which are still legible, was probably due to damage in transit. I have identified the passage as taken from Psalm 115:2, but its purpose on this document is puzzling. Commonly, masons noted down clients' requests for quotations from the Bible for

---

<sup>30</sup> ORO, MS D.D Par/Burford c.1.

<sup>31</sup> TNA, PROB 11/499.

<sup>32</sup> GL, MS 5304/1 Masons' Company Court Book.

inscriptions on memorials, but this quotation would seem inappropriate for such use.

However, the handwriting of this verse is consistent with other notations on the verso and recto.

The Churchwardens' accounts record that Christopher Kempster 'came to view the church with some parishioners' in May 1685, an appropriate opportunity for a ground plan to be made, and in keeping with Geraghty's estimated timescale.<sup>33</sup> Geraghty suggests the plan was prepared by Christopher Kempster, as it is endorsed with the name of 'his father or son' Will Kempster.<sup>34</sup> However, the presence of William's signatures, albeit in the casual form of 'Will', makes the plan more likely to be by William's hand. The fact that the plan came to rest in Christopher Wren junior's collection strongly indicates that it formed a functional part in the Wren office, as a reliable survey drawing. This plan appears to be best evidence that Burford Masons prepared survey drawings for the City church rebuilding campaign. It is possible that some drawings and sketches by the Burford Masons may have been among the hundred or so others in the Wren collection sold after Christopher Wren junior's death in 1747, now lost.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Further evidence of drawing*

The Kempsters' ability to provide their architect with site plans is also found at Tom Tower, in 1681. The importance of the evidence warrants extensive quoting. Wren had

---

<sup>33</sup> GL, MS 5714/1, fol. 303.

<sup>34</sup> Geraghty, 'New Light', p. 137.

<sup>35</sup> Geraghty, *Architectural Drawings*, p. 7.

initially relied on Bishop Fell to send him accurate ground plan measurements from which he could prepare drawings for the new tower. On three occasions Fell provided measurements, the second deviating almost one hundred percent from the first. 'I am confounded by the last peece of ground plot' Wren responded to the second measurement, 'I wrought by the first Ground plot w<sup>ch</sup> differs exceedingly from this'. In Fell's third ground plan, measurements for the mouldings did not tally. Wren's correspondence with Fell at this stage expresses his frustration at being provided with inconsistent information. It is likely that Fell's measurements were provided by Thomas Robinson, mason at Christ Church, with whom Kempster was later obliged to work in partnership. The inaccurate measurements may be a case in point of Wren's view of 'Oxford Artists', of whom he could not 'boast' but who 'have a good opinion of themselves', Wren strongly preferring Kempster to execute his designs instead. In order to ascertain 'once and for all a trew Ground-Plot', Wren asked Kempster to prepare a 'Groundplot and mouldings and such uprights as I directed him to take, soe from 2 witnesses wee shall find out the trewth'.<sup>36</sup> Kempster, responsible for preparing accurate drawings both in plan and elevation, thereby became the arbiter between Wren and Fell.

It is likely that a patron providing a drawing board for his mason-contractor expected him to exercise his skills of draughtsmanship. In Spring 1706, at the commencement of the Strong's contract for Blenheim Palace, Edward Strong, among others including the Clerk

---

<sup>36</sup> CCM, MS 376, letters 25, 26 and 30 June 1681.

of Works Henry Joynes, were supplied with drawing boards at 1s. 3d. each, indicating that their drawing skills were needed in building the Palace.<sup>37</sup>

Paul Jeffery considered, inconclusively, the possibility of Edward Strong junior being the author of a volume of twenty-three drawings probably made around 1700, now deposited at the London Metropolitan Archives.<sup>38</sup> The collection largely comprises drawings of masons' work at St Paul's Cathedral, and at twelve City church steeples, eleven of which Edward junior also constructed. The relevance of the drawings to Edward junior's work, and an inscription in an immature hand on one of the drawings for St Paul's suggested to Jeffery that Edward junior may have been the draughtsman responsible. The collection also included four drawings of All Saints, Oxford, for which Edward donated Taynton stone worth £30 15s. to build the south portico.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of those drawings remains unclear, although Jeffery speculated that some may have been prepared for engraving.

The above exploration indicates that Burford Masons took an active part in measuring sites and executing drawings for the architect. No evidence has been found, however, that they prepared drawings of their own design for the architect, such as architectural details, although given that they possessed skills of draughtsmanship, they may have done so. The architect also relied on his master mason for other traditional skills such as interpreting designs on site, and giving technical advice, which will now be examined.

---

<sup>37</sup> BL, Add. MS 19,592, Blenheim Building Accounts.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffery, 'Some Recently Found Drawings for St Paul's, All Saints, City Churches', *Architectural History*, 35 (1992), 118-134.

<sup>39</sup> Howard Colvin, 'The Architects of All Saints Church, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, 19 (1954), 112-117 (p. 114).

### *Site supervision*

The Burford Masons' experience throws up a number of instances of the architect seldom visiting the building under construction, leaving the responsibility of site supervision to them. Reasons for his absence were doubtless varied, being perhaps the inconvenience of the journey from London, the architect's lack of technical knowledge, or pressure of work. When Timothy, William and Valentine Strong were engaged at Cornbury Park in 1631-33, the architect responsible for the design, Nicholas Stone, admitted he 'was thar in 2 years 33 times', equating to around once every three weeks.<sup>40</sup> When Thomas Strong was building the stables at Cornbury in 1663, and the east, Clarendon front, in 1666, both to Hugh May's designs, May showed no sign of visiting the work in progress, delegating even the preparation of drawings to others.<sup>41</sup>

In Oxford, Wren was confident to leave the interpretation of his designs for Garden Quad at Trinity College to Thomas Strong and his partner, carpenter Thomas Minchin, whilst he was in Paris for seven months. Wren left the country in 1665 before even the exact site was agreed, leaving adjustments of design to accommodate the site when chosen, as well as responsibility for construction, to Strong and Minchin.<sup>42</sup> Another extreme case of Wren delegating site supervision to a Burford Mason, also in Oxford, was at Tom Tower, Christ Church. In 1681 Wren was already heavily committed to ongoing work in London,

---

<sup>40</sup> 'The Note-Book and Account-Book of Nicholas Stone', ed. by Walter L. Spiers, *Walpole Society*, VII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919), p. 70.

<sup>41</sup> John Newman, 'Hugh May, Clarendon and Cornbury' in *English Architecture Public and Private*, ed. by John Bold and Edward Chaney (London: Hambledon, 1993), 81-87.

<sup>42</sup> Wren's letter of 22 June 1665: TCA, Miscellaneous Vol.1, fol. 86/126.

and had been elected President of the Royal Society. Despite the prestige of the commission from Bishop Fell, and the complexity of the design which superimposed the oblong entrance with a chamfered square, an octagonal upper stage, topped with an ogee cap, Wren never visited the site himself. His letters to Fell show that he relied entirely on contractor Christopher Kempster to supervise the work and discuss progress with him in London. 'Mr Kempster now gives me an account', wrote Wren to Fell from London in the summer of 1681, and in December that year 'As farre as I can perceive by discourse with Mr Kempster'.<sup>43</sup> Wren's letters express the difficulties of overseeing work from a distance, which he could not have overcome had Kempster not been present on site, reporting back to him in London.

Even in the early eighteenth century, during the construction of Blenheim Palace, which like St Paul's, had been allocated to several teams, Edward Strong senior appears to have been *primus inter pares*. 'Apply yourself to old Mr Strong' wrote Hawksmoor in 1705 to the Clerk of Works Henry Joynes, 'he will assist you'.<sup>44</sup> Hawksmoor also urged that other mason-contractors at Blenheim should seek Strong's advice, when in doubt.<sup>45</sup>

Stone, May, Wren and Hawksmoor all relied on Burford Masons to interpret their designs and to act as their representatives on site, in fact, as their site architects.

---

<sup>43</sup> CCM, MS 376.

<sup>44</sup> BL, 19,607, Nicholas Hawksmoor, Assistant Surveyor of Blenheim Palace - letter 1705-1715.

<sup>45</sup> David Green, *Blenheim Palace*, (London: Country Life, 1951), p. 238.

### *Acting as technical consultants*

The architect also turned to the Burford Masons for their expertise in a number of structural and technical problems. The stability of foundations was a recurring and serious problem, both for Wren and others. At St Paul's Cathedral, where the trouble had presented itself already in the late 1680s, partners Christopher Kempster and Ephraim Beauchamp were paid for 'opening the Joynts in the Legs' in February 1691, making them structurally sound.<sup>46</sup> It was William Kempster to whom Wren turned in 1707-9, entrusting him with the repair of what Wren called the 'Flaws and Defects in the Vaults', because he deemed it 'requir'd great Care, Skill, and Caution' to carry it out.<sup>47</sup> This was no small undertaking, engaging William with a team of around thirty men for some fifteen months.<sup>48</sup> Edward Strong junior was entrusted with the similarly responsible task of repairing 'all the Fractures & Blemishes in the several Legs and arches of the Dome, occasioned by the Weight of the Dome pressing upon the foundation'.<sup>49</sup>

The problem of settlement in foundations also arose at St Mary's, Warwick, where cracks had appeared in the tower recently constructed by Francis Smith. In 1699 Wren was approached for advice, delegating the investigation to the Edward Strongs, father and son, for which they were paid ten guineas and two guineas respectively.<sup>50</sup> This not only

---

<sup>46</sup> GL, MS 25,471/32, Labours and Work at St Paul's Cathedral, fol. 59; MS 25,473/29, fol. 9.

<sup>47</sup> *Second Part of 'Fact against Scandal: In Answer to a Pamphlet Intitled a Continuation of Frauds and Abuses at St Paul's*, ed. by John Morphew (London: Morphew, 1713), p. 76.

<sup>48</sup> GL, MS 25,473/40 and 41.

<sup>49</sup> GL, MS 25,473/41 and 42.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Farr, *The Great Fire of Warwick 1694* (Hertford: Austin, 1992), p. 97.



highlights the esteem in which Wren held the Strongs, but also the comparative expertise of the Strongs and Smith of Warwick. When no architect was involved, clients turned directly to Burford Masons for structural advice; when the tower of Blockley church, Gloucestershire, was cracking due to foundation failure, the Vestry turned to John Kempster in 1725 to design new foundations and a tower.<sup>51</sup> Christ's Hospital sought expert advice from Edward Strong junior and Ephraim Beauchamp in 1716 when the cloisters were becoming 'not only ruinous but very dangerous'.<sup>52</sup>

As well as advising and correcting structural problems, the Burford Masons were called upon to check on the professional standards of others as independent arbiters. I have discovered that in 1697 and 1700, Christopher Kempster was subpoena'd to appear in two cases concerning the mason John Fitch (Figure 90).<sup>53</sup> As Edmund Dummer, Surveyor to the Navy, is named in the latter case, both almost certainly relate to disputes about Fitch's workmanship in, and payment for, constructing the new dry and wet docks at Portsmouth to Dummer's designs. Wren, as Surveyor to the King's Works, was one of the party called upon to check on Fitch's work, and may well have employed Kempster as consultant, in which case he would have been Wren's expert witness.<sup>54</sup> Records have not been found of the proceedings of either case.

---

<sup>51</sup> John P. Haggart, *Bells Brasses Benefactions Monuments and Charities* (Blockley: Parish of St Peter and St Paul, 2007), p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> WS, XI, (1934), 79 citing Christ's Hospital Court Minutes, p. 611.

<sup>53</sup> KvW.

<sup>54</sup> Wren's report on Fitch's workmanship at Portsmouth docks, 1697: LMA, COL/SP/06/019.

As quarry-owners, the Strong's' expertise was sought in connection with the stone quarries on the Isle of Portland, Dorset, the smooth operation of which was vital to the progress of St Paul's. Already in 1678, problems had arisen on the Isle, prompting Wren to send representatives there, including Thomas Strong.<sup>55</sup> His brother and successor Edward was dispatched to the Isle on no less than five occasions, sometimes in the company of Wren or Hawksmoor.<sup>56</sup> For Edward Strong's twelve days on the Isle in 1696, he was paid the same as Hawksmoor, twelve pounds, handsome recompense compared with the three shillings a day which the Commission paid master masons by day at St Paul's.<sup>57</sup>

Drawing, site supervision, structural expertise, and scrutinizing the work of others were all traditional mason's skills which, despite the arrival of the architect, were still carried out by the Burford Masons on his behalf. Their skill base, however, was expanded by the architect's demands to craft in new styles, and construct the first domed buildings, and a 'cantilevered' staircase. Model-making to test such ideas was another recent addition to the mason's skill-set.

### **Expansion of the mason's traditional skill base**

Summerson pointed out that master craftsmen of substance and ability 'readily understood and absorbed the architectural innovations of the top designers'.<sup>58</sup> The ways in

---

<sup>55</sup> J.H. Bettey, 'The Supply of Stone for Re-Building St Paul's Cathedral', *Archaeological Journal*, 128 (1971), 176-185 (p. 179).

<sup>56</sup> J.M. Halley, 'The Rebuilding and the Workmen of St Paul's Cathedral from the "Accounts"', *RIBA Journal*, 22.3 (1914), 49-60 and 22.4 (1914), 73-82 (p. 56).

<sup>57</sup> GL, MS 25,473/41.

<sup>58</sup> Summerson, p. 247.

which these innovations stretched Burford Masons' skills are now examined.

### *Crafting in the new styles*

Both the early Strongs and Kempsters, practising in a stone area where repairs to medieval buildings were needed, were skilled in the Gothic style; Christopher Kempster, for instance, fashioned new pinnacles for the church of St John the Baptist at Burford in 1672, having repaired them twenty years earlier following damage sustained during the Civil War.<sup>59</sup> He had no difficulty crafting the fan vaulting under Tom Tower (Figure 91). Ten years later, Edward Strong was similarly well able to execute Wren's only City church in the Gothic style, St Mary Aldermary.<sup>60</sup>

The classical style was embraced by the Strongs whilst it was still in its infancy. As early as 1631 Timothy, William and Valentine Strong were building the seven-bay south wing at Cornbury Park to the designs of Stone; although subsequently altered, enough remains of their work for Nikolaus Pevsner to describe it as one of the earliest attempts in England at a classical design for a country house front (Figure 8).<sup>61</sup> Skills learned at Cornbury in crafting elements of classical architecture were to stand them in good stead for their next employment at Canterbury Quadrangle, St John's College, Oxford, in 1633, the first predominantly classical building in Oxford (Figure 9).<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> ORO, MS D.D Par/Burford c.36 Churchwardens' Accounts.

<sup>60</sup> GL, MS 4863/1, Churchwarden's Accounts, St Mary Aldermary, fol. 62.

<sup>61</sup> Jennifer Sherwood and Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: Oxfordshire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 553.

<sup>62</sup> Howard Colvin, *The Canterbury Quadrangle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 1.

Later at Cornbury, Thomas Strong built the stables 'on a grand scale, [...] almost as a classical country house in their own right', going on to construct the Clarendon wing also to classical designs.<sup>63</sup> In Oxford, Thomas Strong's Garden Quad at Trinity College broke with the Gothic tradition to produce what Kerry Downes likens to a service wing of a great house of the 1660s (Figure 14).<sup>64</sup>

The Strong's' early works testify to their ability to grasp and execute the architect's new ideas, showing them working in the vanguard of new styles in the provinces. As noted in Appendix One, it is likely that Christopher Kempster was also working with the Strong's in this period. By the time Kempster and Thomas Strong went up to London, they would have been well experienced to execute the new styles in the City, and within a short time rebuilding that 'truly Baroque conception', St Stephen Walbrook.<sup>65</sup> Their success in executing new styles is further proven by winning many successive contracts by the four major commissions, those for rebuilding the City churches, St Paul's Cathedral, Greenwich Hospital, and the Queen Anne churches, all of which incorporated new thinking in architectural style. At one extreme, in 1681 Edward Strong senior was building what Michael Hall described that 'uninhibited gothic pastiche', St Mary Aldermary, contemporary with Christopher Kempster's fan vaulting under Tom Tower. Some thirty-five years later, partners Edward Strong junior and Edward Tufnell constructed St John Smith Square, which Pevsner considered 'the boldest manifestation of

---

<sup>63</sup> Sherwood and Pevsner, p. 555.

<sup>64</sup> Kerry Downes, *The Architecture of Wren* (St Albans: Granada, 1982), p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: London 1: The Cities of London and Westminster*, 3rd edn, rev. by Bridget Cherry (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), p. 71.

the English Baroque in inner London'.<sup>66</sup> Meanwhile, outside London the Edward Strongs, father and son, built the main pile of Blenheim Palace to Vanbrugh's designs, where, according to John Summerson, 'the English Baroque culminates' (Figure 21).<sup>67</sup> Executing the new designs of architects and absorbing their architectural language put the Burford Masons in good stead to become transmitters of style to the provinces, as will be discussed below.

### *Domes*

Rebuilding the City churches provided Wren with the opportunity to explore new structural ideas, in particular, domes. Churches capped by domes, introduced in England at St Stephen Walbrook, required new structural solutions for support, accommodating thrusts in the outer walls particularly. Seven City churches were rebuilt with domes: St Antholin Budge Row, St Benet Fink, St Mary Abchurch, St Mary-at-Hill, St Mildred Bread Street, St Stephen Walbrook and St Swithin London Stone. All of these domes were constructed of elaborate carpentry frames with internal lath and plaster facings.<sup>68</sup> Burford Masons were contractors for three of these churches, each of which solved the problem of support differently. At St Stephen Walbrook, built by Christopher Kempster and Thomas/Edward Strong, the roof is carried by sixteen freestanding columns within the church, eight of which bear arches supporting the cupola. The elliptical dome at St

---

<sup>66</sup> *Gothic Architecture and its Meanings 1550 - 1830*, ed. by Michael Hall (Reading: Spire, 2002), p. 82; Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: London 6: Westminster* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 679.

<sup>67</sup> Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, pp. 265.

<sup>68</sup> Jeffery, *City Churches*, p. 121; Kerry Downes, *A Thousand Years of the Church of St Stephen Walbrook*, (church leaflet).

Mary Abchurch, where Christopher Kempster carried out the masonry work, rests on pendentives springing from corbels in the outer walls, except for the west side where a column and pilaster are employed. St Mildred Bread Street, a rectangular church built by Edward Strong, combined both solutions, the dome resting on wall arches north and south, and wide arches springing from corbels on the other two sides.<sup>69</sup> Figure 92 illustrates all three methods in plan form.

Outside London, Christopher Kempster was involved in another domed construction by Wren, that of Tom Tower, where an ogee cupola caps the stonework. At Winchester Palace, Wren designed several cupolas, the largest, a central dome rising to thirty feet above the roof, falling within Edward Strong's contractual area. Although the Winchester domes were not built by the time of the King's death which ended the contract, the masonry to accommodate them had been completed.<sup>70</sup>

Edward Strong, and Christopher Kempster with his partner Ephraim Beauchamp, were well experienced to go on to construct half of the drum of the dome of St Paul's Cathedral between them. This was the most difficult of Wren's domes to support. In addition to the foundations problem discussed earlier, the dome construction is clearly larger than the others in height and area, and significantly heavier at around 65,000 tons. It was the first triple dome, comprising an inner dome of brick, a brick cone supporting the stone lantern, which alone weighed some 700 tons, and the usual outer carpentry frame to create the

---

<sup>69</sup> The church was destroyed in 1941, but described in Gerald Cobb, *The Old Churches of London* (London: Batsford, 1942), p. 71.

<sup>70</sup> *HKW*, p. 310.

outer shell (Figure 93).<sup>71</sup> The masonry work below had to withstand these unusually great loads and thrusts.

To restrain the dome from springing out of shape, masons were required to inset stone channels encasing 'innumerable' iron chains, prompting the architect J.M.W. Halley to comment that the dome was 'literally laced together with iron'.<sup>72</sup> Both the Kempster and Beauchamp, and the Strong teams were among those letting in chains. William Kempster also let in several 'great chains' in his south-west tower.<sup>73</sup> Stonework was also secured with iron cramps. Christopher Kempster had worked with Wren's use of iron cramps at Tom Tower to reinforce the transition between square and octagon.<sup>74</sup> Chains were used later by the Stronges at Blenheim Palace to counter the thrust of the arches.<sup>75</sup>

### *Cantilevered staircases*

Apart from the construction of domes and the use of chains, another unusual and structurally challenging technique which extended the Burford Masons' skill base was constructing the Geometric Staircase at St Paul's Cathedral, an achievement of William Kempster in 1705 (Figure 18). Termed a 'cantilevered' staircase (although not structurally cantilevered), it made its first appearance in England in the 1630s at the Queen's House, Greenwich, where Inigo Jones designed the Tulip Staircase after seeing Palladio's

---

<sup>71</sup> James W.P. Campbell, *Building St Paul's* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), pp. 131, 133-134.

<sup>72</sup> Halley, p. 80.

<sup>73</sup> GL, MS 25,473/39 & 40.

<sup>74</sup> CCM, MS 376, Wren's letter to Fell 26 May 1681.

<sup>75</sup> BL, Add MS 19,595.

staircase at the Convento della Carità, Venice, constructed some seventy years earlier (Figure 94).<sup>76</sup> Jones however, introduced rebated treads in his Tulip Staircase to resist movement, a technique followed by Wren and Hooke at the Monument in the City, which Kempster may have seen (Figure 95), and by William Talman with the Great Stairs at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire.<sup>77</sup> The staircase which William Kempster constructed to Wren's designs at St Paul's followed a similar principle. The Kempsters, however, advanced this technique at the modest gazebo at Pytts Lane, Burford, by making the treads triangular in cross-section, almost halving their weight (Figure 96). The date of the gazebo is unknown, but it is possibly the earliest example of this technique which went on to be almost universally adopted in the late eighteenth century at the expense of the earlier Palladian or Jonesian type, particularly in town houses. This gazebo is discussed further below.

### *Models*

The importance of making architectural models had been emphasized by Italian Renaissance theorists such as Alberti, but its practice seems to have come into use only later in England, where the earliest record of a craftsman being required to construct a model is not found until 1568, at Longleat, Wiltshire. The craftsman concerned was a French joiner, probably carrying out what had already become common practice on the

---

<sup>76</sup> *Palladio*, ed. by Guido Beltrami and Howard Burns (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2009), p. 383.

<sup>77</sup> Sam Price and Helen Rogers, 'Stone Cantilevered Staircases', *Structural Engineer*, 83, 2 (2005), 29-36. p. 29.



continent.<sup>78</sup> By the seventeenth century, architectural writers in England such as Sir Henry Wotton in 1624, and both Sir Roger Pratt and the Dutchman Sir Balthazar Gerbier in the 1660s, were recommending the construction of three-dimensional models before embarking on building work. In Pratt's view, the practice would 'not only prevent all future alteration in the building, a thing of a most vast expense, but will likewise avoid all complaint of the master, and abuse of the contriver'.<sup>79</sup> Pratt's observation proved prescient during the construction of Blenheim Palace, when making models helped prevent the tedious rebuilding experienced in the early years of construction.<sup>80</sup>

Three-dimensional models appear to have been used in the design process for at least three purposes: to explore technical problems or innovative ideas for their structural or aesthetic effectiveness, to visualise the designer's proposals, and to transmit to craftsmen detailed instructions which were difficult to convey by drawings.<sup>81</sup>

The use of models appears to have been still uncommon in the early part of the seventeenth century, but already in 1631 Nicholas Stone was commissioned to 'mak all thar moldes' for the proposed work at Cornbury Park, where the Strongs were engaged.<sup>82</sup> Stone, with his mason's training, had worked for a sculptor abroad and also for Inigo Jones, who had experience of architectural practice on the continent. Mention in the sources of any of the Burford Masons making models is found only twenty-five years later, in Valentine Strong's contract for the new manor house at Lower Slaughter, which

---

<sup>78</sup> Airs, p. 86; Howard Colvin, *Unbuilt Oxford* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> *The Architecture of Sir Roger Pratt*, ed. by R.T. Gunther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 22.

<sup>80</sup> Green, p. 85.

<sup>81</sup> Halley, p. 76.

<sup>82</sup> Spiers, p. 70.

required him to build according to 'such mouldes' as he had given the client Mr Whitmore (Figure 46).<sup>83</sup> The words 'model' and 'mold/mould' appear to have been synonymous in the seventeenth century, and both terms were also used to mean a drawing.<sup>84</sup> As three-dimensional models were still rare in the design process at this time, however, it is likely that Whitmore was referring to drawings.

Firm evidence of Burford Masons being required to make three-dimensional models is found later, at St Paul's. Here Wren made great use of models, having discovered their value in his earlier career in science.<sup>85</sup> Models played such a large part in the design process that he had over seventy constructed for St Paul's of varying sizes and materials.<sup>86</sup>

In Wren's protracted struggle with how best to construct the dome, experimenting with models was a vital part of his design process.<sup>87</sup> Between 1690 and 1695, Edward Strong was required to make several masonry models of parts of the dome. In February and May 1691 for instance, Strong completed two masonry models of quarter-parts of the dome, and in June 1694, made a 'large modell' of an eighth of the dome, for which he was paid two pounds and five shillings. The latter model took eighteen days for a mason to complete, plus three days' work of a carver, which indicates the complexity and detail

---

<sup>83</sup> GA, D45/E17.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City 1660-1720* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 121.

<sup>85</sup> Geraghty, p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> Campbell, *St Paul's*, p. 52.

<sup>87</sup> Downes, pp. 27-9.

involved.<sup>88</sup> In December 1695 Strong was required to alter and add to a 'Model of the Legg of the Dome', showing how Wren used models experimentally as his design ideas changed.

The Geometric Staircase in the south-west tower was another challenging construction at St Paul's. Before embarking on this major project, William Kempster spent sixteen days making a model of the 'round stayres' in February 1704.<sup>89</sup> He also made models of the south-west tower in September that year, and in January 1708 for 'finishing of the Tower'.<sup>90</sup> Models of decorative features were also required, such as those which William made of the pedestals of the 'great urns' on the tower.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast to St Paul's, there is little evidence of model making to assist designs for the City church campaign, even when the building proposed was as innovative and complex as St Stephen Walbrook.<sup>92</sup> This is probably reflective of masons having far greater freedom in interpreting designs for the churches, as Summerson postulates.<sup>93</sup> The few models which are known to have been made concern decorative features, and despite the Burford Masons being involved in the construction of almost half of the City churches, no evidence has been found of them making models for this campaign. For the steeple campaign, however, models were made of the more complex designs, such as that of St Vedast alias Foster. In 1712, as mason-contractor for the steeple, Edward Strong junior

---

<sup>88</sup> Gordon Higgott, 'Geometry and Structure of the Dome of St Paul's Cathedral', in *Compass and Rule*, Gerbino and Johnston, pp. 155-169, (pp. 164, 166); GL, MS 25,473/29.

<sup>89</sup> GL, MS 25,473/38, fol. 163.

<sup>90</sup> GL, MS 25,473/39, fol. 236; GL, MS 25,473/40, fol. 96.

<sup>91</sup> GL, MS 25,473/40, fol. 193.

<sup>92</sup> Jeffery, *City Churches*, p. 79.

<sup>93</sup> *Architecture in Britain*, p. 192.

made a model of it extending from below the cornice to the top of the spire, which at a scale of half an inch to a foot would have stood at nearly three feet tall.<sup>94</sup> The complexity of this spire is brought about by accommodating convex and concave stages, a manifestation of the baroque style, relatively new in England at the time. Among the models which the Stronges fashioned at Blenheim was one of the north-east tower, at a scale of one inch to one foot, and another of the northern approach from Ditchley Gate in 1706.<sup>95</sup> None of these models are known to have survived.<sup>96</sup>

## **DESIGN SKILLS: THE ARCHITECT AND THE MASON**

It is apparent from building accounts that in medieval times, the designer of a building was usually a master mason or carpenter who was also in charge of construction, ensuring that the design and building processes were seamless.<sup>97</sup> This arrangement proved satisfactory until design became identified as a distinct and separable function from the physical process of construction. The effect was to remove the design element from the mechanical arts into a concept of the liberal arts, worthy of men of education, who came to be known as architects. Master masons still continued to carry out this function, however, usually in respect of less prestigious buildings, some masons also assuming the title of architect.

---

<sup>94</sup> GL, MS 25,539/12, Expenditure on City Churches, fol. 22.

<sup>95</sup> BL, Add. MS 19,594, fol. 74; Green, p. 80.

<sup>96</sup> Gerbino and Johnston, p. 197; Jeffery, p. 79.

<sup>97</sup> KJ, *The Mediaeval Mason*, 3rd edn (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967) p. 176.

### The mason's increasing identity as 'architect'

The title of architect entered printed English with the publication of John Shute's *First and Chief Groundes of Architecture* in 1563.<sup>98</sup> Shute, a painter-stainer by training, declared himself 'Paynter and Archytecte' on the title page, even though no building has been traced to his design.<sup>99</sup> Shute's book, dealing with the theory of architecture rather than its practice, probably brought the word 'architect' into circulation, irrespective of its appropriate usage.

The client's construction accounts, and bills and epitaphs of contemporary masons, indicate a growing awareness of the term of 'architect'. Already in 1576, the Cambridge mason Richard Kirby was described as 'chief architect' in his employer's will, although this may have reflected the employer's scholarship rather than Kirby's practice.<sup>100</sup> By contrast, the contemporary mason Robert Smythson (c.1635-1614) was performing a significant role in building design and supervision, probably warranting the description of 'architector' on his epitaph.<sup>101</sup> Early in the seventeenth century in Oxford, building accounts were referring to the Halifax masons John Bentley and John Akroyd as architects.<sup>102</sup> The Townesend masons' dynasty of Oxford also reflects this trend: the founder John Townesend (c.1648-1728) submitted his accounts to Queen's College as 'Lapicidae [stonemason] Townesend', although his monument bears the inscription 'in

---

<sup>98</sup> *British Architectural Theory 1540-1750*, ed. by Caroline van Eck (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 53.

<sup>99</sup> Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Elizabethan Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> *Airs*, p. 32.

<sup>101</sup> Girouard, p.17.

<sup>102</sup> *Airs*, p. 33.

architectonica magister' (a most skilful master of architecture).<sup>103</sup> His son William (1676-1739), however, styled himself 'Architecto Townesend' on his bills, yet both were designers of buildings.<sup>104</sup> Within the Smith of Warwick dynasty, the mason Francis described his brother William the bricklayer (1661-1724) as 'architect' on his epitaph; the Smiths also designed many of the buildings they constructed.<sup>105</sup>

Notwithstanding some successful masons calling themselves architects, none of the Burford Masons are known to have assumed this title, not even in their wills or epitaphs, despite carrying out this role in respect of some important buildings of the time, discussed below. Even Edward Strong junior, who travelled on the continent and owned books on architecture, is not known to have called himself an architect. It is likely that the more specific description of 'Citizen and Mason of London', which many of the Burford Masons were entitled to use, was more valuable to them in both economic and social terms. The social status of a Citizen was held to be immediately below that of clergyman or barrister.<sup>106</sup> It is of note that none of the other masons mentioned above were able to use this title. It may also be that, working closely with architects of higher birth and education, the Burford Masons' use of the term would have appeared as social and professional hubris, potentially damaging to their careers.

---

<sup>103</sup> Colvin, 'Townesends', p. 52.

<sup>104</sup> Andor Gomme, *Smith of Warwick* (Stamford: Shaun Tyas, 2000), p. 14; W.G. Hiscock, *A Christ Church Miscellany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 44.

<sup>105</sup> Gomme, p. 35.

<sup>106</sup> Francis Raymond Smith, ed., *The Worshipful Company of Masons* (n.p.: London Masons' Company, 1960), p. 22.

As but few buildings in the incoming styles existed in the country, wider knowledge could be gained by travelling to the continent to study built examples, or by the written word and illustrations, both of which required time and money not usually available to the craftsman. The educated prospective client came to demand a level of scholarship in their designer equalling his own erudition. The designer of choice for elite buildings had first-hand knowledge of architecture on the continent. The benefit of travel abroad and of access to books in acquiring credentials as a designer was increasingly perceived by craftsmen.

### **The importance of travel**

In his petition for the post of Surveyor of the King's Works in 1660, the former royal architect John Webb, pupil of Inigo Jones, commented that 'most gentry in England at this day have some knowledge in the Theory of Architecture'.<sup>107</sup> The political upheavals of the Interregnum had provided an incentive for gentry to spend time abroad, on official business, or to escape the political climate. Hugh May, Sir Roger Pratt, and John Evelyn all travelled at this time, absorbing new ideas on architectural style which they later used as practitioners. Lisa Jardine speculated that Wren spent several months on the continent in 1649, where he would have had first-hand experience of new ideas at a formative age.<sup>108</sup> Certainly Wren was dispatched to France in 1665-6 for some nine months on behalf of the court to report on the latest architectural developments. He sought out new

---

<sup>107</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 1095.

<sup>108</sup> Lisa Jardine, *On a Grand Scale: The Outstanding Career of Sir Christopher Wren* (London: HarperCollins, 2003), pp. 72-86.

styles not only by studying buildings but by meeting architects and copying their drawings, writing to a friend that he would bring back 'almost all France in Paper'.<sup>109</sup>

However, few masons in this country could avail themselves of such opportunities. The designing success of the master mason Stone, who had practised in Amsterdam between 1606 and 1613, emphasises the value of such experience. Stone went on to hold the position of 'master mason and architect' at Windsor Castle, and to take on important design commissions such as Goldsmiths' Hall, London, Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire, and Cornbury Park, Oxfordshire.<sup>110</sup> However, even by the mid-seventeenth century, very few master masons had travelled abroad, almost certainly none of the Burford Masons.

It was not until a generation after Wren's visit to France that the first of the Burford Masons is known to have ventured overseas. Edward Strong junior, probably in 1699, travelled to France, possibly continuing on to Italy, in the company of Wren's son Christopher. It is apparent from Wren's letter to his son that he considered Edward junior significantly more motivated than his son in the pursuit of architecture, writing 'but the seeing of fine buildings I perceive tempts you, and your companion Mr. Strong, whose inclination and interest leades him, by neither of which can I find you are moved'.<sup>111</sup> By this time, foreign travel may have been expected of aspiring masons of means, the

---

<sup>109</sup> *Parentalia*, p. 262

<sup>110</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 990.

<sup>111</sup> WS, xix (1942), 119.



successful Oxford mason William Townesend, Edward junior's contemporary, being another visiting France in the late 1690s when out of his indentures.<sup>112</sup>

Edward junior travelled to the continent again in 1711, this time to the Low Countries with the painter James Thornhill. Thornhill's diary of that journey, comprising both narrative description and architectural sketches, evidences the attention the group paid to architecture in Delft, The Hague, Rotterdam, Ghent, Antwerp and Brussels.<sup>113</sup> Neither the Kempsters nor the Beauchamps are known to have ventured abroad.

### Access to books

Whilst some travelled abroad to seek out new ideas, drawings and books on architecture reached England, where they were increasingly translated, disseminating those ideas to a wider public.<sup>114</sup> Building activity after the Great Fire stimulated an increase in the publication of architectural literature for use by theoreticians and practitioners alike.<sup>115</sup> General book ownership in London saw a threefold increase in the forty years after 1685; the same period noted 17% of craftsmen's inventories to include books, although doubtless many books passed within the family, escaping inventories.<sup>116</sup> Craftsmen made use of the illustrations they contained, treating them as their pattern books.<sup>117</sup> Initially

---

<sup>112</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 1048.

<sup>113</sup> BL, Add. MS 34,788.

<sup>114</sup> See Eileen Harris, *British Architectural Books and Writers 1556-1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>115</sup> Gerbino and Johnston, p. 111.

<sup>116</sup> Lorna Weatherill, *Consumer Behaviour and Material Culture in Britain 1660-1760*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 88, 185.

<sup>117</sup> Airs, p. 54.

books were often provided by the client, like the 'Booke on Vitruvius for the use of the office', purchased around 1679 by the Commission for rebuilding City churches, for three pounds.<sup>118</sup> Some thirty years later when Sir John Vanbrugh could not find 'the French book of Paladio', he wrote to Henry Joynes, Clerk of Works at Blenheim, asking whether it 'be not in Mr Strong's Shedd'.<sup>119</sup> These instances infer that the books were provided by the client. None of the Burford Masons' wills or post-mortem inventories make mention of books, even though it is known that Edward Strong junior did own books on architecture. When abroad with Christopher Wren junior, he took the opportunity to acquire books, experiencing difficulty in getting them past Customs at Dover. Wren, conscious of Strong's encounter, advised his son on another visit to Holland before returning: 'Mr Bateman will give you advice how you may get them [books purchased abroad] into the Secretary's packets. You remember how much trouble Mr Strong was put to at Dover by the impertinence of the Customer there. I hope this may be prevented'.<sup>120</sup>

In addition to buying books on his travels, Edward Strong junior went on to become a subscriber to publishing both volumes of Colen Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (1715 and 1725), both volumes of Le Clerc's *Treatise on Architecture* (1723 and 1724), and other books on architecture by Giacomo Leoni and James Gibbs.<sup>121</sup> He was also a subscriber for John Stow's *Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* revised by

---

<sup>118</sup> Bodl., MS Rawlinson B389, Tabernacles Book.

<sup>119</sup> *The Complete Works of Sir John Vanbrugh*, ed. by Geoffrey Webb, 4 vols (London: Nonesuch Press, 1927-8), IV (1928), 236, letter dated 17 February 1710.

<sup>120</sup> WS, XIX, 119, Wren's letter 11 October 1705.

<sup>121</sup> GA, P141 MI 2/4, Hedges deposits; *Survey of London*, vol. XXXII, Pt II, ed. by F.H.W. Sheppard (London: Athlone Press, 1962), p. 506.

John Strype in 1720, indicating his interest in the history of buildings.<sup>122</sup> As a subscriber, Edward junior contributed to the dissemination of design ideas at his own expense.

Of the Burford Masons, only Edward Strong junior is known to have taken advantage of travel and books, which gentlemen architects had enjoyed many decades earlier, in the seventeenth century. Despite this, the Burford Masons continued to design buildings which they constructed, examples of which will now be considered.

### THE BURFORD MASONS AS MASON-ARCHITECTS

'Buildings without architects are pushed to the sidelines of history', wrote Dana Arnold in *Reading Architectural History*.<sup>123</sup> Some designing role is necessary for any building, but those not attributable to a named architect tend to receive less attention. During the seventeenth century, in contrast to the concentration in the literature, emerging architects were designing only a small proportion of new buildings, leaving master masons to continue their joint role of designing and constructing the majority.<sup>124</sup> Such buildings were very often less prestigious and less well documented, resulting in a lack of information about the craftsman responsible. Identifying the unknown designer in such cases can be difficult, often requiring access to building accounts, drawings, or craftsmen's records, relatively few of which have survived from the period under scrutiny. In the case of the Burford Masons, the number of buildings which can be

---

<sup>122</sup> Published London, 1720.

<sup>123</sup> Dana Arnold, *Reading Architectural History* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 35.

<sup>124</sup> Andrew Saint, *The Image of the Architect* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 57.

identified with some certainty to have been both designed and constructed by them is remarkably small, despite the survival of some of their records such as the Kempster daybooks and the Strong Memorandums, which are not as informative on this matter as might be expected. It is likely that many of the unspecified 'divers houses' which Valentine Strong's epitaph attests him as having built were designed as well as constructed by him.

This chapter now looks at buildings, the design as well as the construction of which can be confidently attributed to the Burford Masons. They are considered according to location, starting in London, followed by the provinces, in each case chronologically. County Hall, Abingdon, is explored as a case study, having been subject to shifting attribution.

## **London:**

### ***College of Arms, east wing* (1688)**

In 1688 Ephraim Beauchamp designed and built the east wing of the College of Arms, London. On 21 December 1687 Beauchamp had exhibited 'two Draughts of an Upright of the Building intended', of which the College 'agreed that the Design with the Circular

Pediment, and rubbed Front and Pilasters be followed'.<sup>125</sup> This is the only known instance of Beauchamp preparing presentation drawings, although now lost.<sup>126</sup>

The north range had been rebuilt in 1671 by the bricklayer Morris Emmett, and the west wing of 1682 by the carpenter John Hodge, continuing the general style. Beauchamp's façade, as built, largely corresponded to the west wing, although Beauchamp's differed in function by providing three dwelling-houses. Figure 48 illustrates Beauchamp's wing around 1750 when it still had its circular pediment and Ionic pilastered frontispiece. The College choosing consistency of design does not demean Beauchamp's contribution or necessarily indicate that his design ability was derivative. The eighteenth-century chronicler William Maitland described the College quadrangle completed by Beauchamp as 'one of the handsomest and best designed brick buildings in London'.<sup>127</sup>

### ***St Bartholomew's Hospital Gateway (1702-3)***

In 1702 Edward Strong junior contracted to build the north gate of St Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield, London, 'according to the modall drawn by the said Edward Strong' in Portland stone, for five hundred and fifty pounds.<sup>128</sup> Although this drawing has since been lost, it is one of the two presentation drawings known to have been prepared by the Stronges to their own designs, the other being for Ardington House (below).<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> CAA, Chapter Book 1, fol. 246.

<sup>126</sup> As confirmed to the author by the College Archivist, 2011.

<sup>127</sup> Walter H. Godfrey, *The College of Arms, London* (London: London Survey Committee, 1963), pp. 13 and 19, citing William Maitland, *History of London* (London: n.pub., 1765), vol.ii, 862.

<sup>128</sup> SBHA, SBHB/HA1/8, Governors' Minutes of 5 March 1701/2, fol. 208<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>129</sup> As confirmed to the author by the Hospital's archivist, 2011.

Edward junior's design recognizes the tradition of dramatic entrance gateways, with sensitive regard to proportion. The north elevation (Figure 60), has giant Ionic pilasters with wreathed capitals, reminiscent of the east façade of the King William block at Greenwich Hospital, where Edward junior was working with his father. Edward junior built even taller giant Ionic pilasters around this time at Addiscombe House, Surrey, possibly to his own design (Figure 59).<sup>130</sup> The allegorical figures of Lameness and Disease reclining on a segmental pediment are in a similar vein to Caius Cibber's statues at Bedlam Hospital of 'Raving and Melancholy Madness', carved in 1680, although perhaps less comfortably accommodated.<sup>131</sup> It is assumed that Edward junior carved the figures at St Bartholomew's, as the building accounts show no separate payment for a carver.<sup>132</sup>

The gateway, which was to be flanked by new tenements, was the beginning of an upgrading of the fabric of the Hospital which took place over the eighteenth century.<sup>133</sup> St Bartholomew's was a hospital for the poor, yet the grand gateway was an expression of its prestige, probably intended to attract charitable contributions.

---

<sup>130</sup> Kerry Downes, *English Baroque Architecture* (London: Zwemmer, 1966), p. 52.

<sup>131</sup> Philip Ward-Jackson, *Public Sculpture of the City of London* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), p. 349.

<sup>132</sup> Author's correspondence with the Hospital archivist, 2009.

<sup>133</sup> *The Royal Hospital of St Bartholomew 1123-1973*, ed. by Victor Medvei and John Thornton, (London: St Bartholomew's Hospital, 1974), p. 281.

## Outside London: Before 1666

### *House at Lower Slaughter, Gloucestershire* (c.1640)

The Strong Memorandums record that around 1640, Valentine Strong 'built an House' at Lower Slaughter for William Whitmore.<sup>134</sup> Although the Memorandums do not identify the house further, it is likely to be what is now known as Manor Farm, situated close to the Manor House which Valentine built in 1656 for Richard Whitmore, son of William, discussed below. The former Manor House was said to be beyond repair in 1637, so it is probable that William Whitmore built this as a temporary replacement.<sup>135</sup> Manor Farm was enlarged in 1688, when it was no longer in the Whitmores' possession.

### *Sherborne House, Gloucestershire* (1651-3)

This is the first of two important buildings undertaken by the Stronges during the upheavals of the Interregnum.

The Memorandums go on to note that in 1651-3, Valentine Strong 'built an House for John Dutton Esq at Sherbourn', Gloucestershire.<sup>136</sup> This had been interpreted as referring to Dutton's grandstand Lodge Park until proved otherwise by discovery of a manuscript

---

<sup>134</sup> SM, Letter-book.

<sup>135</sup> VCH, *Gloucestershire VI* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 129.

<sup>136</sup> SM, Letter-book.

written by Lieutenant Hammond in 1634, describing the Lodge as 'lately built'.<sup>137</sup>

Strong's reference is almost certainly to nearby Sherborne House, residence of Sir John Dutton, who was described on his death as one of the richest men in England. Dutton's friendship with Oliver Cromwell may account for his confidence in building at this time.<sup>138</sup>

There is no consensus, however, as to which part of the house Valentine built. Engravings of Sherborne House show that it comprised ranges of different styles. Kingsley suggests that, although Mark Girouard considered that half of the west front could be attributed to Valentine, it is the south front that was the work of Strong, as it inclines towards Mannerism, and credits him with the loggia in the courtyard.<sup>139</sup>

The house was demolished after the discovery of extensive dry rot, and rebuilt by Lewis Wyatt in 1829-34. The original west façade was re-erected, albeit in a 'considerably mangled form', according to Girouard.<sup>140</sup> The old masonry was numbered and incorporated into the reconstruction.<sup>141</sup> Figure 97 illustrates the west elevation built in 1834, likely re-incorporating elements of Strong's construction.

---

<sup>137</sup> Kingsley, pp. 173-4; BL, Lansdowne 213, fol. 342.

<sup>138</sup> Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, *Architecture without Kings: The Rise of Puritan Classicism under Cromwell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 181.

<sup>139</sup> Kingsley, pp. 24 - 25.

<sup>140</sup> Country Life, *Letters*, 25 October 1956, p. 954.

<sup>141</sup> VCH, *Gloucestershire VI*, p 12.



*Lower Slaughter Manor House, Gloucestershire\_ (1656-8)*

Although not included in the Memorandums, the evidence for Valentine Strong constructing this house rests on a building contract dated 1656 with Richard Whitmore.<sup>142</sup> Like Dutton, Whitmore became a sympathizer of the Parliamentary cause.<sup>143</sup>

The contract required Strong to build according to 'one modell or platfforme' provided by Whitmore, and 'according to such mouldes as hee [Strong] hath given to the said Mr Whitmore concerning the same'. As the contemporary meanings of the terms 'modell', 'platfforme', and 'mouldes' were inexact, the degree of input from Strong is not wholly ascertainable. The resemblance of Lower Slaughter Manor House to the larger, Balmes (or Baulms) House, Hackney, built by Whitmore's cousin Sir George some twenty years earlier, would suggest that the overall design was determined by the client, with Strong supplying the details.

Lower Slaughter Manor was a pioneering building type in the Cotswolds, double-pile, originally of five-by-five bays with a tall, overhanging hipped roof with dormers with a small covered viewing platform on top. In the first floor central bay, the doorway to a balcony was surmounted by a classical broken pediment (Figure 11). The house has been much altered, but its original form is still recognizable (Figure 98).

---

<sup>142</sup> GA, D45/E17.

<sup>143</sup> Kingsley, p. 139.

***Fairford Park House, Gloucestershire (1661-2)***

The evidence for Valentine Strong designing this as well as constructing it is again found in the Memorandums, which state that he 'built an House for Andrew Barker Esq', making no mention of an independent designer. Thomas Strong completed the house upon his brother's death. This was a seven-bay double-pile house with gabled dormers, incorporating classical features such as Corinthian pilasters, cornice, and string-course (Figure 12).<sup>144</sup> The central door was framed by Corinthian pilasters and a scrolled pediment. It displayed the influence of the recently-built Coleshill nearby. The house was demolished in 1955.

**Outside London: After 1666**

***County Hall, Abingdon, Berkshire (1677-81) : A case study***

Lady Celia Fiennes, visiting Abingdon in 1694, described this building as 'the finest [town hall] in England'.<sup>145</sup> Centuries later, Pevsner endorsed her view by declaring it to be the grandest free-standing town hall with an open ground floor in the country. In terms of stylistic maturity, Pevsner considered it compared very favourably with other contemporary Berkshire town halls, such as the sturdier and more Jacobean-style hall in Wallingford (c.1670), Faringdon, which is smaller and more provincial, and even Windsor, built in 1687, which despite being designed by Sir Thomas Fitch and completed

---

<sup>144</sup> Kingsley, p. 99.

<sup>145</sup> 'The Journeys of Celia Fiennes', ed. by Christopher Morris, (London: Cresset, 1947), p. 39.

under the supervision of Wren, is less correct in grammar.<sup>146</sup> It compares especially well with several further west, such as that in Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire (1698). Andor Gomme considered Abingdon County Hall 'set a new standard for architecture in provincial towns, being a traditional market house on an "heroic" scale'.<sup>147</sup> Figure 99 shows County Hall some forty-five years after it was built, and Figure 22 as it stands today, the first floor windows having been altered in 1852.<sup>148</sup>

No contract with Kempster is extant, although payments to him for constructing the masonry are found in the Borough Chamberlain's Accounts. John Scarborough measured his work in 1680.<sup>149</sup> The Chamberlain's Accounts refer to 'Christopher Kempster the undertaker of the building the Sessions House'.<sup>150</sup> The title 'undertaker', explored in Chapter Four in the context of contracting by great, was used contemporaneously to indicate a craftsman acting in the dual capacity of designer and builder, and was used of Kempster again in connection with the Perrott aisle, below.<sup>151</sup> Whereas it is clear at County Hall from the records that Kempster was responsible for all the masonry, sculpture, and supply of stone above foundation level, it is the authorship of the outstanding design which has been subject to debate.<sup>152</sup>

---

<sup>146</sup> *BOE: Berkshire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 56, 34.

<sup>147</sup> Gomme, p. 441.

<sup>148</sup> R. Gilyard-Beer, *The County Hall, Abingdon* (HMSO: 1956), p. 5.

<sup>149</sup> ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts; BL, Add MS 28,666 (measurement by John Scarborough, 15 April 1680).

<sup>150</sup> ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts 15 November 1679.

<sup>151</sup> NCA, Account of the New Building 1681/2-5.

<sup>152</sup> ABC, Chamberlain's Accounts.

The Chamberlain's Accounts which record the Council's outgoings include payments for the construction of County Hall, even itemising Kempster's 'tobacco and piping', yet make no reference to payment for drawings or design. The Bailiff's Accounts and Council minutes are similarly silent on this question.<sup>153</sup> No design for this building has been found among Wren's large collection of drawings, although it is possible a drawing may have been among those auctioned in 1747, now lost, mentioned above.<sup>154</sup>

County Hall illustrates the problems of shifting attribution. The design having been variously attributed to Inigo Jones and John Webb, in 1942 the Wren Society had 'no hesitation [...] in accepting this charming little building as the design of Sir Christopher Wren'.<sup>155</sup> The Wren Society, however, was endeavouring to re-establish Wren's position, and some of its attributions have subsequently been challenged. Summerson was a little more tentative, saying that Wren 'must surely have been concerned in the design', suggesting that it was inspired by Le Vau's wings at the College des Quatre Nations in Paris.<sup>156</sup> The resemblance of County Hall to that building is not overwhelming, however. In 1966 Kerry Downes judged it 'probably' Kempster's design; the 2010 edition of *Buildings of England: Berkshire* considers the design sophisticated enough to 'suggest some involvement with the king's architect'.<sup>157</sup>

---

<sup>153</sup> ABC, Bailiff's Accounts & Council Minutes.

<sup>154</sup> Geraghty, p. 7.

<sup>155</sup> Caroe, p. 86; WS XIX, 100.

<sup>156</sup> Summerson, *Architecture in Britain*, p. 218.

<sup>157</sup> Downes, *English Baroque Architecture*, p. 5; Geoffrey Tyack, Simon Bradley and Nikolaus Pevsner, *BOE: Berkshire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 103.

Wren had opportunity to mention any involvement he may have had in the design when he cited this building to Bishop Fell as a testimonial to Kempster for the forthcoming work on Tom Tower. Wren commended 'X<sup>topher</sup> Kempster he wrought the Town house at Abbingdon'; but he did not add *for me*, or intimate any personal connection with the building.<sup>158</sup> Wren continued, in the next sentence, that Kempster 'is very carefull to worke trew to his designe' (Figure 25), perhaps inferring Kempster's own designs.

County Hall was intended to be highly prestigious, a weapon in the town's competition with Reading to secure a permanent base for the Berkshire Assizes and gaol, which Abingdon duly won.<sup>159</sup> This motive alone might have encouraged the Council to approach Wren for the design, but they would equally have paraded his involvement proudly, had that been the case. They would also have sought to entertain their celebrated architect, whereas the Accounts only record them entertaining Kempster. There is no reference to Wren in any of the Council's records of the time.

In support of the case for Wren, R. Gilyard-Beer considered it 'significant' that the measurer John Scarborough was used to certify Kempster's work at Abingdon.<sup>160</sup> However, Scarborough, although frequently employed by Wren on City churches (including St Stephen Walbrook) and St Paul's Cathedral, also undertook work for others, such as the Duke of Somerset at Petworth House, Sussex, in 1690, making it equally

---

<sup>158</sup> CCM, MS 376, letter dated 26 May 1681.

<sup>159</sup> Gilyard-Beer, p. 3.

<sup>160</sup> Gilyard-Beer, p. 5.

possible that he was working at Abingdon independently of Wren, introduced by Kempster.<sup>161</sup>

In terms of design, certain elements display a lack of sophistication, pointing to a lesser hand than Wren's. For instance, the even number of bays, four by two, disregards strict classical concepts. This solution was probably dictated by the confines of the site and the height required, resulting in a particularly tall and monumental building. At the rear elevation, the buttresses to the staircase tower, albeit an afterthought, disappear into the tower structure without proper resolution, as happens at the Perrott aisle. Details such as these suggest a less experienced designer than Wren.

The design of County Hall displays references to Dutch Palladianism, particularly its hipped roof, octagonal cupola, balustraded gallery, and pedimented dormers, all similar to nearby Coleshill House, built around 1650, and Ashdown House, built around 1665, both of which Kempster would have known. In County Hall, these elements of the domestic canon have been translated into civic architecture. It was not the first attempt to achieve this; William Hurlbutt incorporated these features in Warwick's Market House (1670) after studying Roger Pratt's Kingston Lacy House, Dorset.<sup>162</sup> Henry Bell built the Custom House in Kings' Lynn (1683), with similar references.

Kempster would have been familiar with the use of giant pilasters in London, for example at Lindsey House (1640), and the terrace in Great Queen Street (1637). The arcading used

---

<sup>161</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 908.

<sup>162</sup> Gomme, p. 16.

at the Royal Exchange (1671), close to St Stephen Walbrook where Kempster was engaged for many years, may also have influenced the design. The east windows of St Stephen's closely resemble those at Abingdon.

Airs observes that in Tudor and Jacobean times, market halls were usually entrusted to only the very best craftsmen in the locality.<sup>163</sup> It is likely that this tradition continued later into the seventeenth century. Kempster was a relatively local man, able to provide quality stone for the new construction, as his quarry had for the previous building.<sup>164</sup> He had the cachet of having worked for five years on City churches for Wren, would have been conversant with Wren's architectural grammar, and well equipped to assemble elements of it in a new building such as County Hall.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, I see no persuasive reason to attribute the design of this building to anyone other than Kempster.

***Perrott aisle, St Mary's, North Leigh, Oxfordshire (1687)***

Evidence for Christopher Kempster's role as designer of the Perrott aisle rests on the application for, and grant of, a faculty in May 1687 made by the patron and Lord of the Manor of North Leigh, James Perrott.<sup>165</sup> It can be seen from the application (Figure 47)

---

<sup>163</sup> Malcolm Airs, *The Buildings of Britain: Tudor and Jacobean* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1982), p. 103.

<sup>164</sup> Gilyard-Beer, p. 3.

<sup>165</sup> ORO, MS Oxf.Dioc.c.455, fol. 103 application 10 May 1687; ORO, MS Oxf.Dioc.c.105, fol. 10 grant of Faculty 25 May 1687.

that it was made without preparatory drawings, the only information given that the aisle was to be on the north side of St Mary's, 24 foot long and 16 foot wide. Perrott sent 'Mr Kempster my undertaker' to deliver the application and answer questions if required. Perrott's use of the term 'undertaker', and his sole reliance on him, point convincingly to Kempster acting as mason-architect. Indeed, Colvin considered the aisle was 'doubtless designed by Kempster himself'.<sup>166</sup>

In view of Perrott requesting that the Faculty be granted 'in as short a time as conveniently may be', it is most likely that Kempster began construction soon after it was granted. It is unlikely that Perrott waited until the early eighteenth century to build the aisle, as Jennifer Sherwood asserts, probably taking her cue from the wall memorial to James Perrott, dated 1724.<sup>167</sup>

The aisle was intended to be a private chapel abutting the north side of the nave (Figure 26). It is separated from the main church by a two-bay Tuscan arcade, and is served by an independent west door access. Beneath the aisle is a 'dormitory and place of Buryall' for James Perrott's family, which when opened up in 2001 revealed barrel-vaulting with stone walls.<sup>168</sup>

Many details of the Perrott aisle show Kempster's heavy indebtedness to his experience with City churches. The three large, round-headed windows with cherub keystones which

---

<sup>166</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 608.

<sup>167</sup> Jennifer Sherwood, *Guide to the Churches of Oxfordshire* (Oxford: Robert Dugdale in association with Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust, 1989), p. 127.

<sup>168</sup> ORO, MS Oxf.Dioc.c.105, fol. 10; author's conversation with St Mary's archivist, 2006.



light the small area very effectively are reminiscent of Kempster's work at St Mary Abchurch and St James Garlickhythe particularly. The round-headed windows with eared architraves, which Jennifer Sherwood finds an 'odd combination', bear similarity to those which he crafted at St Mary Abchurch, as does the round window with cherub keystone above the west door of the Aisle (Figures 100 and 101).<sup>169</sup>

Whilst amalgamating elements of City church style, there are other details which lack such sophistication, like the buttresses on the west and north elevations already noted as similar to those at County Hall. As at Abingdon, no attempt was made to disguise their function, or decorate them. The Tuscan columns of the arcade, although relatively squat, have an exaggerated entasis, bold, flowing acanthus leaves emerging above each abacus, wholly unrelated to the Tuscan order (Figure 102). This muscular representation is Baroque in spirit, reflecting Wren's development in this direction at the time. With the Perrott aisle, Kempster brought cutting-edge ideas from London to the provinces, not simply copying ornaments, but interpreting them as his own.

***Gazebo, Pytts Lane, Burford*** (date unknown)

The attribution for this garden pavilion (Figure 103 ) rests on the letters 'CK' carved on the exposed underside of the stone staircase. The inscription was identified as a mason's mark of the Kempster workshop by a stonemason at the Exhibition of Stonecraft held at

---

<sup>169</sup> Sherwood, p. 127.

the Tolsey Museum in Burford in 1966.<sup>170</sup> Inspection showed it to be wearing away, but still identifiable (Figure 104). I have not come across any other mason's mark by the Kempsters to compare it with. This is perhaps to be expected, as by 1700 almost all masons' marks were inscribed on hidden faces such as joint beds.<sup>171</sup> The conspicuous placing of the Kempster mark on the gazebo and its large size are unusual, probably intended to remain visible to identify the author, as it was built in the garden of a house in the ownership of the Bartholomew family, into which Christopher Kempster junior had married.<sup>172</sup> It is an open question as to which Christopher Kempster this work is attributable to.

As discussed earlier, the innovative construction of the gazebo's flight of steps places this modest building in the vanguard of architectural development. A thermal window on the flank wall is a classical element probably emanating from Christopher senior's experience of City churches, such as his east window at St Stephen Walbrook. The string course is also taken from classical grammar. Other elements, such as the hexagonal window, and triangular-headed doorway and its label, have no known precedent.

***Kitts Quarry (east front), Upton, Burford (1698)***

The architrave of a ground-floor window beside the door on the east elevation of this

---

<sup>170</sup> Reported to the author by the late Roger Warner, owner of the Gazebo.

<sup>171</sup> Jennifer S. Alexander and Kathryn A. Morrison, 'Apethorpe Hall and the Workshop of Thomas Thorpe, Mason of King's Cliffe: A Study in Masons' Marks', *Architectural History*, 50 (2007), 59-94, p. 65.

<sup>172</sup> R.H. Gretton, *The Burford Records: A Study in Minor Town Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), p. 370; ORO, MS D.D Par/Burford c.1.

Kempster family home (Figure 27) bears the inscription in Roman lettering, 'Christopher Kempster built this in 1698' (Figure 105). Whereas this may have been inscribed with pride at any time by the Kempsters who remained in the house until the late nineteenth century, the profile of the window architraves reflects this date, being similar to others appearing in Burford around this time, such as Roche House (Figure 106), refronted in 1696, the Old Rectory (Figure 70), built around 1700, and the gazebo opposite Westhall Hill Manor, family home of the Bartholomews (Figure 107).

The stonework of the east front of Kitt's Quarry is of cut and squared rubble, its fine jointing perhaps an example of Christopher Kempster's 'strong well banded workes' for which Wren had commended him almost twenty years earlier.<sup>173</sup> The frontage is modest, restrained, and surprisingly traditional for a mason who had taken part in what Christopher Hussey described as the 'greatest building adventure of the age'.<sup>174</sup> In his seventy-first year, Kempster apparently chose to retain something of the idiom of his forefathers for his family home. Perhaps this bears out Wren's view of Kempster as a 'modest' and 'honest' man.

### ***Ardington House, Berkshire* (c.1720)**

Ardington had previously been attributed to the Townsends of Oxford until the emergence of presentation drawings at the Berkshire Record Office in 1963 proved otherwise. One of these drawings, of the east and north elevations (Figure 108), is

---

<sup>173</sup> CCM, MS 376.

<sup>174</sup> 'Burford, Oxfordshire', *Country Life*, 24 August 1948, pp. 332-335 (p.335).

unsigned, whereas another drawing, apparently in the same hand, of steps, chimneypiece and overmantel, bears a note signed 'From yr Servt at Command Tho Strong', seeking further instructions from the client Edward Clarke.<sup>175</sup>

Colvin presumed this Thomas Strong to be the middle son of Edward senior; *The Buildings of England: Berkshire* also subscribe to this view.<sup>176</sup> However, I have found no evidence that Edward senior's son Thomas was either apprenticed to, or worked as, a mason; on the contrary, he was described as a 'gentleman' of London already in his early thirties.<sup>177</sup> His ledger stone in St Peter's in St Albans bears no reference to him as a mason, nor is he mentioned in the Memorandums, yet a great deal of his brother Edward junior's work as a mason is included. The only Thomas Strong active at that time appears to have been the son of Valentine, who worked in London and was probably responsible for Ardington House.

Ardington House displays strong Baroque features in plan, with corridors running along the axis of the house. The oeil-de-boeuf and round-headed windows on the east elevation (Figure 109) are not unlike those on the King William block at Greenwich Hospital.

Gervase Jackson-Stoppes connects these features and its vertical emphasis with Addiscombe House, Surrey, built by Edward Strong junior (Figure 59).<sup>178</sup> The skilful use of polychrome brickwork may have been influenced by Marlow Place, Buckinghamshire,

---

<sup>175</sup> Gervase Jackson-Stoppes, 'Ardington House', *Country Life*, 15 October 1981, pp. 1282-1285 (p. 1283).

<sup>176</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 997; *BOE: Berkshire* (2010), p. 130.

<sup>177</sup> HRO, 1.0.25, and 80973/4, mortgage and assignment.

<sup>178</sup> 'Ardington House', p. 1284.

attributed by Colvin to Thomas Archer, which Andor Gomme suggests may have been constructed by Strong.<sup>179</sup>

Similarities in the style and vertical emphasis of Ardington House with the demolished Berkshire houses Lockinge Manor (1725-30) and Maiden Erlegh (1730), prompted Adolf Placzek to deem it 'almost certain' that these too were designed by Thomas Strong.<sup>180</sup>

***Tower of St Mary, Longcot, Berkshire (1722)***

Inscribed on the flyleaves of the Baptism Register for Shrivenham, Berkshire, are Memoranda from the Longcot churchwardens' accounts, now lost, recording that after the old tower fell down in 1721 it was rebuilt for £226 by ' — Strong of Stanford...He was a reputable mason'.<sup>181</sup> Colvin interpreted this as referring to either John, Edward senior's brother who was apprenticed in London and set up in Stanford, or John's son John, born 1684.<sup>182</sup>

The round-headed windows with emphatic keystones, and string-courses, are indebted to the classical canon. Strong's 'flower pots' or corner urns on the parapet, removed in the interests of safety, would have balanced the tower's proportions. With their removal, the tower as it now stands appears truncated (Figure 110).

---

<sup>179</sup> Andor Gomme, 'Thomas Strong and Thomas Archer', *Country Life*, 24 December 1981, p. 2257.

<sup>180</sup> *Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Architects*, ed. by Adolf Placzek, vol 4, (London: Collier Macmillan, 1982), p. 145.

<sup>181</sup> Rev. Basil F.L. Clarke and H.M. Colvin, 'The Rebuilding and Repair of Berkshire Churches during the Seventeenth, Eighteenth, and early Nineteenth Centuries', *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, 53 (1953), 65-99 (p. 97).

<sup>182</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 937.

*Tower of St Peter and St Paul, Blockley, Gloucestershire (1725-7)*

One further building of the Kempsters' design, but constructed by another master mason of renown, is Blockley church tower (Figure 111). The drawing for the tower, held in the Worcestershire Record Office, is the only example of a presentation drawing prepared by one of the Kempsters to his own design.

The mason Thomas Woodward the Elder of the Chipping Campden dynasty constructed the tower in 1725-7. Woodward's contract required him to build 'according to the Modell Severall platforms Draughts or Schemes thereof hereto annexed'.<sup>183</sup> The drawing sewn into the contract shows an elevation and several floor plans of the tower (Figure 112). The construction was supervised by Francis Smith of Warwick who, in a letter dated 25 October 1725 reviewing the terms of Woodward's contract, recited a clause that the tower was to be built 'according to the Draught given in by Kempster'. The late John Haggart, chronicler of the church's history, noted the Vestry minutes stated this drawing was by John Kempster, youngest son of Christopher, but I have been unable to locate the source to verify this.<sup>184</sup> A Thomas Cornell, churchwarden, was party to the contract, most likely a relative of Richard Cornell from Blockley who was apprenticed to Christopher in London.

---

<sup>183</sup> WRO, 705:66 BA228/78.

<sup>184</sup> Haggart, p. 8.

The tower as executed combines classical and Gothic elements. The west doorway and first floor window differ from the drawing, probably resulting from the parish's wish to re-use as much of the old stonework as possible (Figure 113). Both bear some resemblance to those at the Perrott aisle, pointing to a Kempster design, whereas the Gothic belfry windows recall those at Chipping Campden, home of the Woodwards, and are probably their input. Colvin describes the tower as 'vernacular baroque', producing a 'rustic hybrid'.<sup>185</sup>

The above buildings are the only ones found which Burford Masons almost certainly both designed and built, with the exception of Blockley tower. Almost all exhibit design ideas deriving from their experience of building to the ideas of others, illustrated most clearly in their works after going up to London, particularly County Hall, Abingdon, and the Perrott aisle. All show versatility and originality, components of styles often being combined to produce a unique building, unfettered by strict adherence to rules of contemporary architectural grammar. Such personal interpretation results in individual and sometimes delightfully eccentric outcomes. It is perhaps this quality to which Wren referred in 1694, writing 'Our English Artists are dull enough at Inventions, but when once a forreigne patterne is sett, they imitate soe well that commonly they exceed the originall'.<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Howard Colvin, 'Gothic Survival and Gothick Revival' in *Essays in English Architectural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 231.

<sup>186</sup> WS, 11 (1934), 74.

There are many other instances where the balance of probability of the Burford Masons acting as mason-architects falls heavily in their favour, but space does not permit their individual examination in this study.

## **STYLISTIC INFLUENCE ON THE PROVINCES**

After their London experience, some Burford Masons returned to the provinces.

Christopher Kempster had retained his family base in Burford over the forty years he worked in London. His Daybook, and papers in Chancery, shed some light on the firm's ongoing work in Burford, continued by his sons Christopher and John.<sup>187</sup> Neither is known to have trained in London, but would have knowledge of metropolitan styles through their father.

Of the Strongs, Edward senior retired to St Albans, Hertfordshire, apparently no longer engaged in building. His brother John, having trained in London, set up his own masonry business and dynasty in Stanford-in-the-Vale, Oxfordshire. Edward junior retired in his early fifties, continuing to live in Greenwich. Ephraim Beauchamp, whose involvement in building appears to have ceased after the St Paul's contract ended in 1707, retired to Tottenham in Middlesex and thence to Hertford.

The Burford Masons' home or adopted towns of Burford, St Albans and Stanford-in-the-Vale all exhibit the early introduction of new ideas in the provinces, as do the towns of

---

<sup>187</sup> ORO, 96.81, John Kempster's Will dated 7 August 1739.



Winchester and Woodstock, where they were professionally engaged for periods of time. Buildings and sculpture in these locations which suggest their hand or influence will now be considered.

## **Buildings**

A number of contemporary buildings in Burford have facades in the restrained style of Kitt's Quarry (Figure 27), such as the Old Rectory (Figure 70) and Roche House (Figure 106). A datestone on the latter bears the initials of Robert Aston, who, as Kempster's friend and client, would probably have employed him to refront his house.<sup>188</sup> The Great House (Figure 71) and no's 19-21 High Street show a sophistication of style and quality of execution not previously evident in the town. The later seventeenth and early eighteenth century was a period of prosperity in Burford, when many houses were refronted in the fashionable style. The design of these buildings and their quality of execution suggest the hand or influence of the Kempsters or the Strongs with their metropolitan experience.

In St Albans, where Edward Strong senior purchased and probably extended New Barnes House, now Sopwell House, where he settled (Figure 28), there are many residences of elegant brick construction dating from the early eighteenth century, Ivy House (Figure 114), Romeland House (Figure 115), Dalton House and Waxhouse Gate all being

---

<sup>188</sup> BT, Daybook, fols B9<sup>v</sup> and B10<sup>r</sup>.

outstanding and attributed to the Strongs.<sup>189</sup> Some may indeed have been built by them, the Strongs having acquired experience of building in brick in London, or may simply show their influence. Records are silent on this question. Strong is known to have been involved in property dealings in the town with his son-in-law Robert New, at least from 1705.<sup>190</sup>

Some towns where the Burford Masons were engaged in prestigious projects display a contemporary injection of metropolitan style. At Winchester, where fashionable people prepared to follow the king, several courtiers built stylish residences, no doubt taking advantage of the availability of materials and the skills of the many craftsmen engaged on the Palace.<sup>191</sup> The 'School' building at Winchester College, (Figure 116), was begun under the auspices of Warden John Nicholas in September 1683, the month in which Christopher Kempster and Edward Strong senior's contract for the Palace foundations terminated.<sup>192</sup> A remarkable resemblance can be seen in the finely-executed stone garlands above the windows of 'School' and those by the Strongs at St Benet Paul's Wharf (Figure 117), by then almost completed. A similarity in the treatment of the roofing and round-headed windows at 'School' with Kempster's County Hall, Abingdon, built two years earlier, has been observed by Paul Holden (Figures 22, 99); School's lugged

---

<sup>189</sup> VCH, *Hertfordshire*, II (London: Dawsons, 1971), pp. 420 & 473; J.T. Smith, 'Nine Hundred Years of St Albans: Architectural and Social History', *Hertfordshire Archaeology*, 11 (1993), 1-22 (p. 17).

<sup>190</sup> *St Albans 1650-1700*, ed. by J.T. Smith and M.A. North (Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications, 2003), p. 206.

<sup>191</sup> B. Vesey-Fitzgerald, *Winchester* (London: Phoenix House, 1953), p. 103.

<sup>192</sup> RIBA, WRE/1.

window architraves are very similar to those at Kempster's Perrott aisle (Figure 100).<sup>193</sup> In 1684, when work above ground had commenced at Winchester Palace, Warden Nicholas also commissioned extensive alterations to No. 3 The Close. Records do not reveal the names of masons working on these buildings, but the coincidence of dates and the correspondence of styles point to the hand of Edward Strong or Christopher Kempster. Several houses were built for courtiers in the town whilst the Palace was under construction, among them 26-7 St Swithun's Street for the Duke of York, 4 St Peter Street for the Duchess of Portsmouth, and 8-9 Kingsgate Street for the Duke of Buckingham's son.<sup>194</sup> Bishop Morley, who 'thought himself obliged to keep pace with the King', built the south front and west wing of Wolvesey Palace around this time.<sup>195</sup>

Whilst engaged at Blenheim Palace, Edward Strong senior and junior lodged in Woodstock Rectory (now Bishop's House), adjoining Blenheim Park.<sup>196</sup> This rectory was built by Bishop Fell of Oxford some time after 1686 for the rectors of nearby Bladon.<sup>197</sup> The Vanbrughian tower-like extensions (Figure 118) were almost certainly built by the Stronges during their occupation between 1705 and 1712. Vanbrugh was also established in Woodstock around this time, and could have influenced the design.<sup>198</sup> Several other houses in the town were rebuilt or altered in the new idiom, such as Hope House (14

---

<sup>193</sup> Paul Holden, 'The Lead-Work at Winchester College School', *Georgian Group Journal*, 12 (2002), 238-245 (pp. 244, 238).

<sup>194</sup> Vesey-Fitzgerald, p. 103.

<sup>195</sup> *Parentalia*, p. 326; Jeremy Musson, 'Wolvesey Palace, Winchester', *Country Life*, 20 March 1997, pp. 74-7.

<sup>196</sup> VCH, *Oxfordshire XII*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 407.

<sup>197</sup> Adolphus Ballard, *Chronicles of the Royal Borough of Woodstock* (Oxford: Bocardo, 1896), p. 97.

<sup>198</sup> Webb, p. xxv.

Oxford Street), newly built in 1709 for Mr Parker, a maltster and town mayor.<sup>199</sup> A witness statement in the 1723 lawsuit against the Duchess of Marlborough, made by Thomas Sheen, a mason from nearby Long Hanborough, claimed that stone from the Blenheim site was carried to and used at several houses in Woodstock, including Hope House and the Rectory, where it was "used at the said Mr Strong's house".<sup>200</sup>

Contemporary building activity in Woodstock may therefore have been activated by the availability of materials, craftsmen and architects, rather than the demands of incoming fashionable residents, as at Winchester. David Green has noted that 'this Vanbrughianism [...] breaks out in the neighbourhood of [...] nearly all Vanbrugh mansions'.<sup>201</sup>

## Sculpture

### *Wall monuments*

Ideas which the Burford Masons encountered in London can be detected in the sculpture of funerary monuments in the Burford area. Reference was made in Chapter Five to the Sylvester family's wall monument in Burford church, which Christopher Kempster's Daybook reveals him having sculpted for ten pounds, in 1674 (Figure 74).<sup>202</sup>

Contemporary with Christopher's early days in London, it displays finely-carved Corinthian capitals and an acanthus frieze, with a highly elaborate cornice, clearly exhibiting ideas absorbed in London. The wall memorial to Christopher (Figure 75),

---

<sup>199</sup> VCH, *Oxfordshire XII*, p. 343.

<sup>200</sup> BL, Add MS 19,618, fol.163.

<sup>201</sup> Green, p. 270.

<sup>202</sup> BT, Daybook, fol. B9<sup>r</sup>.

more than forty years later, bears the inscription 'His Son William erected this', leading to the assumption that William carved the monument. However, inspection of William's daybooks has revealed that he commissioned his London carver John Barker to fashion it for the sum of £11 12s., William by then being in his mid-sixties.<sup>203</sup> Barker's receipt for William's part payment for the work, found in his daybook for private work, can be seen in Figure 119. The weeping cherub at the base of the monument closely resembles those embellishing the Dean's Door at St Paul's Cathedral, which was part of William's contract, doubtless also carved by Barker (Figure 120).

Cherubs of similar outstanding craftsmanship and style are found above and below the monument to John Thorpe in St James the Great in nearby Fulbrook (Figure 121). Thorpe was the vicar of Burford who recommended Christopher Kempster for building the chapel at Trinity College, Oxford, discussed in Chapter Four, so it is most likely that the Thorpes would have turned to the Kempster workshop for their family monument. A very similarly-fashioned cherub is found beneath a memorial some twelve miles east of Burford at Cassington, Oxfordshire, commemorating a Francis Seale of St Clement Danes (Figure 122). Seale's family had married into the Perrotts of nearby North Leigh, for whom Kempster built the aisle in 1687. However, Seale died in 1720, two years after William Kempster, but it is likely that surviving Kempsters still had contact with the carver Barker. All the cherubs discussed above are sculpted of different stone to the monuments they relate to, and are affixed independently, suggesting they were executed separately. It is likely they were all sculpted by Barker, through Kempster contacts.

---

<sup>203</sup> KvW.

St John the Baptist, Burford, contains two wall cartouches of 1689 commemorating the Bartholomew children (Figure 123). Sherwood and Pevsner consider these 'comparable with the very best London work of this date'.<sup>204</sup> Christopher Kempster's oldest son Christopher married into the Bartholomew family in 1673, making it highly likely that these originated from the Kempster workshop.<sup>205</sup> Later cartouches are found in neighbouring churches, notably the James Stephens tablet of 1692 in St Mary's, Great Barrington, Gloucestershire (Figure 124). It is known from his epitaph that Stephens married Barbara Bray, the Bray family being lords of the manor in the village. Christopher Kempster's niece Mary also married into the Bray family, in 1688.<sup>206</sup> On stylistic and biographical grounds, this monument is likely to be from the Kempster workshop. Sophisticated cartouches are also found around Stanford-in-the-Vale where Timothy and John Strong settled, for instance at Shellingford, Berkshire.

No carver's signatures have been found on these monuments to identify authorship, this being a practice which became more common in the eighteenth century.<sup>207</sup>

### ***Bale tombs***

It is clear that the style and quality of execution of church monuments in the Burford area developed significantly after the Great Fire provided opportunity for 'foreigners' to work

---

<sup>204</sup> *BOE: Oxfordshire*, p. 379.

<sup>205</sup> ORO, MS D.D Par/Burford c.1.

<sup>206</sup> ORO, MS D.D Par/Burford c.1.

<sup>207</sup> Brian Kemp, *Church Monuments* (Oxford: Shire, 2010), p. 28.

in London. One type of monument, however, which was not indebted to their London experience but which originated very likely from the Burford Masons' workshops, was the 'bale' tomb. These prestigious churchyard monuments are a local variant of the chest tomb, but taller and more slender, with a semi-cylindrical capstone or 'bale' on top of the ledger. This capstone is often held to represent a corded bale of wool or cloth, but the wealthy merchants commemorated, where identifiable, were not known to have been connected with either trade. An alternative explanation which has been put forward suggests that the bale represents a pall draped over a hearse.<sup>208</sup>

Almost a hundred bale tombs survive, all but a few outliers being east of a line drawn between Winchcombe and Cirencester, Gloucestershire.<sup>209</sup> The majority are found in the Windrush valley, all but seven of the total within ten miles of Burford, and half of those within five miles of the town.<sup>210</sup> Burford being the fulcrum of bale tomb distribution points almost unequivocally to the Burford Masons' workshops for at least those in the area. The Strong and Kempster families are also commemorated by fine bale tombs. Valentine Strong's tomb at Fairford, Gloucestershire (Figure 125), is decorated on the sides and ends with large acanthus scrolls and a cartouche, common motifs found on many later tombs. John Kempster, son of Christopher, erected his own family bale tomb in Burford churchyard in 1719 (Figure 126); his inscription 'J<sup>o</sup>K fecit' has been recorded on another bale tomb in the churchyard, and on a further one in nearby Asthall,

---

<sup>208</sup> Hilary Lees, *Exploring English Churchyard Memorials* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), p. 61.

<sup>209</sup> Lees, p. 61.

<sup>210</sup> B.J. Marples, 'Some Capped Tombs', *Oxoniensia* 47 (1982), 139-140, p. 140.

Oxfordshire (Figure 127).<sup>211</sup> Sculptural motifs link these tombs to many others in the area. Of those more distant outliers, the two bale tombs at Ardington, some twenty-five miles south in Berkshire, doubtless result from Thomas Strong's activity at Ardington House; there are remains of a bale tomb in Blockley, Gloucestershire, a similar distance north-west of Burford, where John Kempster designed the church tower. The tomb may result from John Kempster's involvement, or was perhaps introduced through Richard Cornell, Christopher Kempster's apprentice from that village.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter, examining the role of the Burford Masons during the time of the emergence of the architect, has shown the architect relying on them for many more traditional skills than laying masonry, in fact carrying out work which today would fall into the province of the architect or structural engineer. Many of the Burford Masons' skills which the architect drew on formed part of the design process, illustrating a collaborative approach to design.

Although the first Burford Masons did not enjoy the advantages of travel and access to architectural books as gentleman-architects did, it was shown that they nonetheless absorbed the new classical style early on its arrival in Oxfordshire. Their skills were further stretched by innovative, complex techniques such as the construction of domes

---

<sup>211</sup> As recorded in 2003 by Christopher Walker, Chairman of Burford Tolsey Museum.



and cantilevered staircases. Through crafting experimental models, they helped new structural design to evolve and be realized with confidence, enabling architectural style to move forward.

Having worked with the foremost architects at the cutting-edge of new ideas, it is not surprising that the designs of the Burford Masons were generally found to reflect the progression of contemporary styles. Most examples of their activity as mason-architects were identified in the provinces, showing them to transmit style through built examples. The blossoming of new styles of buildings and sculpture in areas closely connected with the Burford Masons points to their influence as a school.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT:**

### **CONCLUSION**

By examining a group of some of the foremost English masons of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, this thesis has shed light on changes in building practices, which were increasingly shifting towards modern ways of working.

Scrutiny of hitherto untapped sources, in particular daybooks and business papers, has produced important new evidence enabling a comprehensive account of the lives and careers of the Burford Masons to be presented for the first time. The research has added to the scholarship on the Strong dynasty, it has plucked Andor Gomme's 'mystery man' Christopher Kempster and his dynasty out of relative obscurity, and brought Ephraim Beauchamp to light. It has uncovered their interdependence, and disentangled and corrected misattributions and mistaken family relationships which have travelled through the literature. It has produced the first catalogue of their work, revealing its enormous breadth.

Examination of their role in conjunction with the emerging architect did not indicate a rigid separation in the design and construction of prestige buildings. It found design to have been a collaborative process in many cases, the Burford Masons bringing their unique and complementary abilities into a close working relationship with the architect, contributing to moving architectural style in this country on to

the classical and Baroque. Technical innovation necessary to realise the new styles was achieved by this mutuality. Their close working association with architects, especially with Wren for over five decades, challenges the emphasis on architects in the historiography at the expense of master craftsmen.

Significant changes were found in systems of employment. In the provinces, the Burford Masons were seen to profit from the mobility offered under direct labour. The contracts they took in London by measure, often demanding a large and flexible workforce, enabled them to expand their businesses. It was found that in five of their major contracts in the provinces, undertaken by great, payments were released intermittently, effectively turning them into hybrid contracts. Alongside their contractual work in London it was shown that they carried out significant work by day, demonstrating that the application of the contracting system was not as clear-cut as has been assumed. These findings illustrate flexibility in contractual arrangements, reflecting a period of complex transition from direct labour to contracting. Analysis of the Burford Masons' contract terms showed them to have been far from comprehensive, leaving the mason a high degree of freedom, which probably resulted in the client's increasing concern with non-compliance. Examination of a broader sample of contracts and building accounts would be needed to endorse such trends, which future research could investigate to provide a wider context for the Burford Masons' experience.

Craft practices were also undergoing change at this time. In the hiatus of waning control by the London Masons' Company and the gradual introduction of statutory provisions, it was found that more flexible working practices developed, such as craftsmen carrying out the work of another trade, employing masons unaffiliated with the Company, and setting apprentices to work without their masters' supervision. It was shown that the Burford Masons, despite their commitment to the Company, were among those taking advantage of these opportunities which utilised labour more profitably. The Burford Masons were found to be on the one hand supportive of the medieval hierarchy of the Company, yet on the other, motive forces in its decline.

Perhaps the most significant change in building practice was brought about not within the construction industry, but by an external factor: the rapid emergence of the credit-based economy in London. Coming from the country, the Burford Masons' experience of this change was particularly dramatic. It was shown that they learned to exploit their new business environment through giving loans and mortgages, broadening their business to become financiers and entrepreneurs, contributing to the construction of both private and public buildings in London.

One of the major findings of this thesis was the ability of the Burford Masons to counter the ongoing burden of large arrears from dilatory payments. Sale of stone from their quarries was found to be a major factor, this cushion of profit becoming their source of initial credit. Far from being a handicap, their country origins gave

them several advantages over their urban competitors. This highlights the need for further investigation into how major City mason-contractors without such resources coped with dilatory payments, perhaps Samuel Fulkes, also a contractor at St Paul's.

By countering late payments, the Burford Masons were found to effectively provide involuntary loans, underwriting their various clients, mainly Commissions, for whom they worked. This finding underlines the dependence of major public projects on private individuals, public finance proving highly unreliable. Without the financial stamina of contractors like the Burford Masons, the rebuilding of City churches and St Paul's Cathedral would have temporarily ground to a halt, and the completion of these and other major projects such as Greenwich Hospital and Blenheim Palace would have been seriously delayed, potentially jeopardising their stylistic unity. As the Burford Masons were involved with many prestigious buildings, their contribution to architectural history through their role as creditors alone was significant.

This study showed the Burford Masons as a remarkably homogeneous group embodying elements which Colvin identified as constituting a school of masons. He singled out schools emerging from the nurseries of quarries, serving nearby towns with stone and masons, and noted the importance of dynasties in handing down experience and capitalising the firms. With London as their major market, the Burford Masons not only meet Colvin's criteria, but go beyond them in their high degree of interdependence, forming partnerships, passing their metropolitan craft

skills on through education, and contributing to the dissemination of ideas to the provinces through apprentices and buildings, all these being constituent elements of a school. These factors have established them as what could be called the 'Burford School of Masons', examples of whose fine craftsmanship were identified in London and particularly in the provinces. Comparable patterns might be found by examining the work of other dynasties, such as the Townesends of Oxford, John Townesend also working in London.

The source material of this thesis could be further scrutinised by social or economic historians for different lines of enquiry, for instance in the study of shifts in social class, of rural communities, or the rise of mercantile capitalism in the City. This thesis, however, although touching on those disciplines, is placed firmly within the relatively new investigation in architectural history into the role of craftsmen and their practices. It has examined aspects of building practice drawn from the experience of the Burford Masons, which, although relatively broad-based, could be built on by investigating other contemporary masons to produce a wider perspective.

But for the Great Fire, the Strongs might have remained masons of regional importance, the Kempsters in relative obscurity, and Beauchamp may well have chosen a different career path. This catalyst and the long working association of Christopher Kempster and Edward Strong senior with Wren propelled them into national importance. Their success brought them great personal wealth, elevating

them into the ranks of gentlemen, and easing their descendents into higher social ranks. The thesis has shown the Burford Masons embracing the changing demands in construction, finance, and organisation of their firms during a time of transition from master-craftsmen to multidisciplinary master-builders.